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And all is changed in time and place;
Thrice blessed are the pure in heart,
For only they shall see GOD's face.
Man's life from cradle leads to tomb:
Man's love from earth may lead to heaven:
Be thankful, therefore, thou to whom
A heart was given. — HON. ROBERT LYTTON.

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UNAWARES.

CHAPTER I.

"Quaint old town of toil and traffic."
LONGFELLOW.

"YOU might tell us something, Madame Angelin, since you know so much!"

"Yes, indeed. What is the good of knowing if you keep it to yourself?" cried a younger woman, impatiently, placing, as she spoke, her basket of herbs and vegetables upon the broad stone edge of the fountain around which a little group had gathered.

"Was it a fit?"

"Has Monsieur Deshoulières gone to him?"

"Is he dead?"

"What becomes of her?"

"Holy Virgin! will the town have to bury him?"

The individual upon whom this volley of shrill questions was directed was a small, thin, pungent-faced Frenchwoman, who had just filled her pitcher at the fountain, and stood with hands clasped over

her waist, and with ineffable satisfaction in her twinkling black eyes, looking upon the excited questioners who crowded round her. It is not given to everybody to know more than their neighbors, nor, as Veuve Angelin shrewdly reflected, is it a privilege to be lightly parted with. There was something very enchanting in the eager attention with which her information was awaited, and she looked round upon them all with a patronizing benignity, which was, to say the least, irritating. The May sun was shining brightly over old pointed roofs; the tiny streams running out of three grim carved heads in the stone fountain danced and sparkled in its light; the horse-chestnuts stiffly standing round the little "Place" threw deep shadows on the glaring stones; from one side sounded the soft wash of an unseen river; old, dilapidated houses were jumbled together, irrespective of height and size; behind the women, the town with its clustering houses rose abruptly on the side of a steep hill, crowned by the lovely spires of the Cathedral; and before them, only hidden from sight by the buildings of a straggling suburb, stretched the monotonous plains and sunny corn-fields of the granary of France.

Veuve Angelin smiled indulgently and shook her head. "You young people think too much of gossip," she said.

"So they do, Marie, so they do," responded an old woman, pushing her yellow, wizened face through the shoulders of those in front of her. "In our day things arranged themselves differently: the world was not the magpie's nest it is now. The young minded their elders, and conducted themselves sagely, instead of chattering and idling and going — the saints know whither!"

Veuve Angelin drew herself up. She was by no means pleased with this ally. "All that may have been in your day, Nannon," she said spitefully, "but my time was very much the same as this time. Grandfather Owl always thinks the days grow darker."

"Hear her!" cried the old woman, shrilly. "Has she forgotten the cherry-trees we used to shake together, the —"

One of the younger of the group interrupted her unceremoniously, "Ta, ta, Nannon, never mind that now! Tell us, Madame Angelin, whether it is all true which they say about the poor old gentleman and the beautiful young demoiselle. *Ciel!* there is the clock striking noon, and I should have been back from market an hour ago. Quick! we all die of curiosity;" and she caught some water in the palm of her hand and sprinkled it over the drooping herbs in her basket, while the others pressed round more eagerly than ever.

But Veuve Angelin's temper had been roused by Nannon's reminiscences.

"I am going," she said crossly. "No one shall ever accuse me of gossiping. Monsieur's breakfast has to be prepared by the time he returns from the Cygne, and with this monster of a pitcher to carry up the hill, just because the *fille* who fetches the water is ill — "

"Let me carry your pitcher, Madame Angelin!"

"I will take it to the very door. *Peste*, it is hard if one can't do so much for one's friends."

"Yes, yes, Fanchon will carry it like a bird. And so Monsieur is absolutely at the hotel?"

"Bon jour, mesdames," said old Nannon, laughing shrilly. "No one cares to help me with my basket, I suppose? It is heavy, too: it contains the clean clothes of my sister's girl, Toinette, a good, hard-working girl she is, and *fille* at the Cygne, as you know. — What, Fanchon, my child, you would carry it! How admirable you are with your attentions to a poor old woman like me! I was wrong, Madame Angelin, I acknowledge it, in my estimate of your generation."

There was a hesitating movement among the women: they had forgotten Toinette, and with such a link it was possible that Nannon might be the best newsmonger after all. Veuve Angelin noticed the movement, and it filled her with dismay.

"I saw it myself, I tell you," she cried loudly, plunging at once into the heart of her subject. "I saw them come out of the Cygne, the old monsieur and the young lady, and walk up and down, up and down, under the trees before the door, and then just, just as they came towards me — "

She stopped. The women pressed closer. Fanchon was drawn back, and listened enthralled; old Nannon, whose temper was not so sharp as her words, chuckled under her breath, and said, "She has started at last." Veuve Angelin looked round and went on in triumph, nodding her little head, and throwing out her hands.

"It is as I have told you. They were close by me, those two, and turning round to enter the hotel again, when, in one second — his foot slipped, and he came down on the pavement with his head against the steps. Imagine my feelings!"

A buzz of sympathy responded to this appeal. In the character of an eye-witness, madame almost became a heroine. Fanchon timidly inquired, —

"He is old?"

"He looked half dead before."

"And he is hurt?"

"Hurt! Of what then do you conceive our skulls to be composed? of granite — iron — india-rubber? *Tenez*, I heard it crack, I tell you; and after that there is not much to be said."

"No, assuredly."

"Madame has reason."

Veuve Angelin looked proudly at Nannon: Nannon laughed.

"Since the monsieur is dead, it is strange that Monsieur Deshoulières should trouble himself to pass the morning with him," she said.

"And why?" demanded Mère Angelin, reddening with anger. "Is it likely, — I put the question to you all, mesdames, — is it likely that she — she! — should be a better judge of what is strange in the proceedings of Monsieur Deshoulières than I who have lived in his service for nearly fifteen months?"

There was a murmur in the negative, but it was not very decided. These doubts had the effect of weakening the general confidence.

"Certainly, madame should know," said her stanchest adherent.

"Nevertheless," persisted Nannon, "you may rest assured that an hour ago he was not dead, and that Monsieur Deshoulières was doing his utmost that he should not die."

"Not dead! But I tell you I heard his skull crack!"

"How can you answer that, Nannon?"

"His skull? Bah! I was in the house at the time, and helped to carry him upstairs. M. Deshoulières came while I was there."

There was a general exclamation, old Nannon was surrounded. Here was one who had been more than an eye-witness, an actual actor in the event which was agitating Charville. Fanchon caught up her basket again, another seized her umbrella, she was the centre of the group which moved away, questioning as they went, towards the upper town. Veuve Angelin would have been left behind, bitter and friendless, to drag her heavy pitcher as best she might up the steep hill, and to moralize upon the fleeting charms of popularity, if old Nannon, generous in the moment of victory, had not desired one of her followers to assist her.

The hot sun streamed down upon the narrow, ill-paved streets; little gutters trickled crookedly through their middle; the women toiled slowly up, keeping under the shade of gaunt, picturesque houses, all irregularly built, high and low, gabled and carved, delightfully artistic in their very defiance of proportion. Rough steps led up to the houses, great projecting blocks of stone ran along their front, with pots of bright flowers resting upon them: everywhere there were windows, — up in the roofs, down in quaint unexpected corners, — clothes hung out of them, here and there long strings of peascods. Strange little stone workshops were built up by themselves in the street, so

small that the workmen looked too big for them: every thing was shelving, dirty, picturesque. The people sat outside their houses, tight-capped children played about, the sun fell on them, on the gay flowers, the green peascods, — somehow or other from everywhere bright bits of color flashed out gorgeously. Nannon, with her poor, weather-beaten face, and her shoulders broadened with labor, walked sturdily on in her blue stuff gown, a little shawl crossed under an enormously wide black waistband, a plain white cap pulled forward on her forehead, and slanting upwards behind, — gesticulating and talking in her high, shrill, unmodulated voice. Fanchon, by right of her basket, kept close beside her; last of all marched Veuve Angelin, half-curious and half-contemptuous.

There is no news like one's own news.

CHAPTER II.

"A square-set man and honest."
The Holy Grail.

KNOTS of people stood about the streets, all talking of the strange event. Charville is rich in beauty, in picturesqueness, in its magnificent Cathedral, but its events are few and orderly. People do get killed every now and then, it is true: only a few months before, young Jean Gouÿe had fallen from a scaffolding, and never spoken again. But then everybody knew Jean Gouÿe, and all about him: there was no mystery or room for speculation in his fate, poor fellow! This last was a very different matter. Who were the strangers? Where did they come from? Where were they going? What brought them to Charville? What made him fall? Was he dead? Was mademoiselle in much grief? Each person asked the other without much hope of finding out: it was something to get hold of Nannon, and hear the little she had to tell. There was no hurry of business to interfere with their curiosity. Charville took life

leisurely: if a house had to be built the masons talked, laughed, joked with each other between laying on their stones; the shoemakers gossiped with their neighbors; women brought their work to the door, played with the children, scolded or chattered. It was an easy, quiet, lounging sort of existence, without much distraction from the outer world, — a magnified village life. Such an event as had occurred that morning came upon them like a new sensation. Nannon had never been made so much of. Veuve Angelin followed sulkily.

She would not accompany the triumphal progress to the door of the Cygne, but turned down a narrow, ill-paved street, which branched off by the Evéché, and ended in a small, modern square. M. Deshoulières' house stood in the midst of it, and she entered hastily, with some fears lest he should be there, and angry at the delay of his breakfast. He was an easy-going master, just the one that Veuve Angelin liked, too much absorbed with his own thoughts and interests to interfere much with her sovereignty; but every now and then he awoke sufficiently to make her aware that she could not presume absolutely upon his absent ways. Even when she ruled most despotically she was just a little afraid of him. There was always a possibility that he might assert the prerogative of having his own way. Now she was conscious that he

would have a reason for indignation, if he returned, hungry and weary, from his morning's work, to find the house empty, no food prepared. "It is all the fault of that gossiping old Nannon!" she said crossly, as she stopped, hot and out of breath, to listen at the foot of the stairs for her master's steps overhead. She heard nothing; but it was with the air of a martyr that she mounted, prepared, if there was need, to expatiate upon her own sufferings, and the inconveniences caused by the absence of Lisette, the *fille* who generally fetched the water. She need not have been afraid. It was quite two hours afterwards — the things were set out in the little *salon*, with its polished floor, its red curtains, its mirror, its time-piece; in the kitchen, where Veuve Angelin also slept, little pots and pans were simmering and bubbling over tiny hollows filled with charcoal, scooped out of the brick arched stove — before the doctor and little Roulleau, the notary, came round the corner with excited faces, eagerly talking as they walked.

"Man's folly is never so apparent as in his last moments," the doctor was saying cynically, as they turned in from the square, and began to mount the bare, uncarpeted staircase.

Veuve Angelin, standing at the top, caught the words with a certain grim satisfaction.

"So he is dead, after all, in spite of that old

woman's obstinacy," she said volubly. "I knew it from the first: what one sees one sees, and what one hears one hears, and nobody can make it different. But as for those creatures, bah! They are *imbécilles*, know-nothings: one might as well waste one's breath upon a stone wall. Monsieur has no doubt just come from the Cygne?"

"Hold your tongue, Marie," answered the doctor, shortly: "get us something to eat, and do not kill my patients beforehand."

"Something has vexed him," reflected Marie, vanishing promptly. "Do what one will for their comfort, those men are always ungrateful."

She would have made up for his want of communicativeness by listening to the conversation as the two drank *vin ordinaire*, and munched radishes, but M. Deshoulières was exasperatingly silent. Two or three times the notary glanced at him as if about to speak, but checked himself. He looked troubled, gloomy, abstracted. The companions were very different in appearance; M. Deshoulières, unlike the conventional type of his countrymen, largely built, with a massive head, a quantity of short light hair, and thick moustaches, warmer in tint than his hair. He had blue eyes, very blue, well-opened and quick; a finely shaped mouth; over all a grave expression which somewhat alarmed people. I ought perhaps to say, alarmed

people who were well, the sick could never understand their previous fears. He made enemies for himself by his want of sympathy for imaginary complaints, he was too straightforward and truth-telling ever to be entirely popular; but he had a little kingdom of his own where he reigned triumphantly, — a sad little kingdom, perhaps, one in which he was always fighting, helping, cheering, — out of which had grown the grave expression, the abruptness of which others complained, but one which had also its tributes and its victories and its satisfactions, and which was dear to the man's good heart. In his ears there sounded, it is true, a never-ending din of murmurs, suffering, feeble moans: to balance these, there were glad, grateful looks, patient thanks, a lighting up of faces at his step. Such a life needs compensations, and he found them. He might come away, as I have said, grave and absorbed; but he rarely looked as he looked when he sat in his little *salon* on this particular morning, — gloomy, worried, and out of sorts.

Monsieur Roulleau noticed the change. Monsieur Roulleau noticed many things for which no one credited his little half-hidden eyes. Somebody once said of him that his face had not the resolution to show its owner's character, you might look at it for so long a time without finding any thing to read. It was answered that he was indeed a blank, his

wife ruled and treated him as a cipher. On the whole, he was supposed to be a little, timid, good-natured creature, no one's enemy but his own, and urged on to exertion by his wife. Charville half pitied, half laughed at him. M. Deshoulières had known the little man for many years, and did him good turns when they lay in his power. He looked upon him as something of a victim with this wife in the background, and her terribly strong will. The doctor pushed away his tumbler of wine, lit a cigar, and leaned back in his chair, thinking and frowning with all his might. He was quite unconscious that M. Roulleau, with his back to the window and the red curtains, was not letting a look or a sign escape him; but he grew a little worried with Veuve Angelin's ostentatious service.

"That will do, Marie," he said sharply. "You can leave us and close the door."

Veuve Angelin went away in a fume. After enduring the dulness of these men over their food, it was intolerable that she should be excluded from the more sociable condition which cigars were likely to produce. She slammed the door in token of wrath, and stayed close by it, picking up stray words and disconnected sentences which had the effect of adding rather to her bewilderment than her knowledge.

"Bear witness," said the doctor at length,

abruptly, "bear witness always, Roulleau, that I did my utmost to point out to Monsieur Moreau the absurdities, the inconveniences, of such an arrangement."

The notary bowed and spread open his hands.

"There can be no occasion for M. Deshoulières to speak of witnesses when the world will have his own word."

"True," replied M. Deshoulières, simply. "Nevtheless, we both know enough of the world to be aware that it holds no prerogative so dear as that of doubt. You and I understand the matter clearly: there may be a dozen others in Charville who will trust me loyally, some will comprehend the broad fact that, by the law, my quality as the doctor attending M. Moreau in his last illness precludes my receiving any benefit whatever under his will. But for the rest—"

"No one would be capable of cherishing thoughts so base, so detestable," exclaimed the notary, with a burst of enthusiasm.

"Bah! Nothing more is required for their fabrication than a little ignorance and a little love of gossip. Are these so rare, my good M. Roulleau?" The doctor made two or three vigorous puffs. Presently he held his cigar in his hand, and broke out again: "What possessed the man to dream of such a thing? He knows nothing of me, absolutely

nothing. I may forge, burn, steal, poison the young man, let the girl starve. Do you mean to tell me that every thing is placed in my hands?"

"The will I have had the pleasure to frame under Monsieur Moreau's instructions authorizes Monsieur Max Deshoulières as *depositaire* to receive all rents and moneys due to Monsieur Moreau or his heirs, and to hold them in trust until the arrival of Monsieur Fabien Saint-Martin, sister's son to Monsieur Moreau; always deducting a certain sum, named, sufficient to maintain his wife's niece, Mademoiselle Thérèse Veuillot, upon the condition only that she continues to reside in this town of Charville —"

"Pardon," said the doctor, interrupting: "the sum assigned for this purpose can hardly be called a maintenance."

Roulleau shrugged his thin shoulders.

"It is bare without doubt," he replied; "and I ventured to point out this fact to Monsieur Moreau. But he was peremptory. He was peremptory also in his provisions that you should deliver up the papers to no one but Monsieur Saint-Martin in person. He is peremptory, it appears to me, in all his expressions."

"Peremptory!" broke in M. Deshoulières once more: "he is immovable — made of adamant. Not one man in a thousand could have forced himself to

perpetrate all these absurdities in a condition like his. To have opposed him further would have been to kill him. What creatures we are! Here is a man, shrewd, keen-witted, prompt; an old man, whose hold on life was palpably failing, who had but recently buried his wife, who could not close his eyes to the fact that he was himself rapidly approaching death. And yet this man makes no provision for the inevitable. It finds him without so much as his earthly affairs settled, clinging to a stranger for unwilling help."

The notary did not answer. Perhaps some shadow of the inevitable swept also over him as the doctor spoke. His hand shook as he poured more wine into his tumbler, and drank it thirstily. M. Deshoulières sat thinking. Outside sounded a measured tramp, tramp: a company of soldiers were marching through the little Place. The children ran and marched too, in imitation. The sun gleamed sharply on the bayonets the men carried over their shoulders; the steps died away along a narrow street. Presently M. Deshoulières said in a musing tone, —

"There will surely be no difficulty in discovering this nephew?"

"One cannot tell. There are strange stories of disappearances. At all events, if ten years elapse without his arrival, the property is dispersed among

charities. And his injunctions against advertising were very strict."

"Strict? say fierce, *mon ami.* There is some motive we do not comprehend underlying it all. From the bottom of my heart I believe he is acquainted with his nephew's whereabouts, and would force him to return voluntarily. But what have I done that I should be made a cat's-paw?"

"Without doubt it is Monsieur's well-known honorable character which influenced his choice."

M. Deshoulières made a gesture of impatience.

"Honorable character? Bah! The man knows nothing of my character or my honor either. I wish I could honestly say he was not in his proper senses. When I think of what has been done, it seems to me that he is a madman and I am a fool; but I suppose the world will pronounce him a fool and me — a knave. Stop, I know what you are going to say; nevertheless, you will discover that I am right. If there was any good to be gained by this ridiculous trust, one might endure it with philosophy. As it is, I foresee nothing but annoyance, trouble, and gossip."

"Monsieur alarmed with the prospect of gossip? I have always understood that he despised it," said the notary, with a scarcely perceptible sneer.

"That depends. The thing may sting although it is contemptible."

"Mademoiselle Veuillot will require a home," said M. Roulleau, after another pause.

"There is no time to spend over new perplexities," answered M. Deshoulières, impatiently, jumping up and pushing back his chair. "I must return. Come with me, Roulleau: there is just the possibility of his having arrived at a more Christian state of mind, and agreeing to an alteration."

"He must die, I presume?" remarked the notary.

"Die? Yes. No one but he could live through the night, but he will no doubt do so — out of contrariety," added the doctor, under his breath.

The two men rose. Veuve Angelin had only just time to scurry into her kitchen before they appeared, ran down the stairs, and into the little square. There was a statue in the centre, of course, and trees planted round it, with benches here and there for the idle. Nurses and their charges strolled about under the little patches of shade, a band played lively airs from the last comic opera, two or three men sat outside a café and smoked. M. Deshoulières turned abruptly down the narrow lane along which Veuve Angelin had carried her pitcher. Such contrasts — outside, the sun shining, people laughing and amusing themselves; inside, sorrow, and hush, and death — were too thoroughly matters of course with him to

be much noticed. Perhaps he had seen deeply enough into life to know that, after all, the contrast is often superficial. Not unfrequently the laughter would be tears, if it dared: the sharpest grief is sometimes denied the luxury of a sign. Heaven help such poor souls! Moreover, the contrast, such as it is, came before him every day. It shocks us when we are suddenly brought out of the noise and turmoil about us, face to face with that dread Angel whose step each hour brings nearer to ourselves. But this man lived, as it were, in his presence, and was not jarred by any discord between that consciousness and the life of every day. Nevertheless, on this day there was a strangeness about the event which impressed him and made him impatient of interruption to his thoughts. He was glad to leave the music and the dancing children and the sunlight behind him, and to feel himself under the shade of the great cathedral, though he did not put his fancy into words, or acknowledge more than a pleasant friendliness as he looked up at the beautiful spires, the firm upspringing lines, the lovely rose windows, the noble portals, the thin solemn statues with folded hands and serene attitudes, — the whole aspect of the building ever varying, severe or tender, as the case might be, but always inconceivably peaceful.

The little notary had hard work to keep pace

with his companion's long strides. They went round two sides of the Cathedral, then out of the Place Notre Dame into another street, as narrow as the others, but somewhat unlike them. The houses were not crowded together in so odd a fashion. They had outside shutters, which were closed against the sun; and high up were long rambling wooden balconies, over which green vines clambered and tossed themselves. Further on, a house was being dug out, — the house of some famous man: the workmen were a little excited over a fresh discovery. M. Deshoulières passed without a look, and presently came upon the Cygne, standing in a triangular Place, set round with sycamore-trees. At the door M. Roulleau ventured upon a remark.

"Do you intend to suggest any course of action to the young lady?" he asked.

He received no answer. Just then the doctor was not thinking about the young lady. He strode hastily up the stairs, through an atmosphere yet heavy and sweet with its lingering cloud of incense, and into the room where M. Moreau was doing battle with the last enemy he would have to contend with. A girl stood by the side of the bed, looking down on the dread struggle with pitiful eyes. Except now and then moistening the poor parched lips or smoothing the tumbled pillow,

there was nothing for her to do but watch: all apparent consciousness was at an end; no sign of recognition greeted the doctor. He also stood watching for a few minutes before he turned to the girl.

"How long is it since this change came on, mademoiselle?"

"About a quarter of an hour. I think he hardly heard Monsieur le Curé's last words," she added, under her breath. Her voice trembled: that quarter of an hour had seemed very terrible to poor Thérèse. The sunlight streamed in at the window, but, in spite of it, the room looked dark and funereal: there was a heavy paper on the walls; stiff, solid furniture; in one corner a huge black stove reared itself grimly towards the ceiling. The women of the house would have stayed with her, but the old man was impatient of their presence: almost his last word had been a peremptory "Go!" still fierce enough to frighten them. It was not likely that the consciousness of any person's presence would return, as M. Deshoulières quickly perceived. He took the little notary to the door, and told him so.

"There is no possible use in your waiting, M. Ignace," he said. "I was a fool, and must abide by the consequences. Nothing will ever be changed now. What is the matter?—are you ill?" he went on, noticing his pale face.

"For the moment, — only for the moment, M. Deshoulières," answered the little man, with a quavering voice. "It is so horrible, you know, to see him like that. Will — will it be soon?"

"I do not know. It is what we must all come to," said the doctor, sternly. He shut the door, and went back to the bedside. "That man is a veritable coward," he said, half aloud, so that Thérèse might have heard if she had not been busied with a vain attempt to soothe the increasing restlessness of the dying man. Those two, and old Nannon, who came in after a while of her own accord, watched together. It was at an end before morning, as the doctor had foretold. When the gray dawn broke over the old weird-looking houses, with the young sycamore-trees standing sentinel-wise before them; when it touched the beautiful stern lines of the Cathedral, and delicate carving blossomed into distinctness, and light stole into the shadowy depths, and the little lamp before the altar burned yellow, and the jackdaws woke up screaming and busy, Monsieur Moreau lay with a quiet look upon his features to which they had long been strangers, until it seemed as if the day, which was bringing youth to all the earth, had brought it back to him, and fixed it on his face for ever.

CHAPTER III.

"Les vertus se perdent dans l'intérêt comme les fleuves se perdent dans la mer."

MADEMOISELLE VEUILLOT and M. Deshoulières stood by the bedside silent. Noticing her a little curiously, he fancied there was more awe than grief in her countenance: it was white and troubled; but there had been enough in the night's vigil to account for that. She stood looking sadly down, her hands knitted together, the morning light full on her face. Gray eyes with long lashes, a mouth delicately lined, a round forehead, neither straight nor classical, but full of a certain sweet nobility, with waved brown hair lying softly and lightly upon it. He looked at her with a half-pitying, half-uneasy sense of guardianship. She was so girlish, so fragile, so dependent. "What am I to do with her!" thought M. Deshoulières, despairingly.

Aloud he said, so abruptly that she started,—

"You have been much tried, mademoiselle. Let me urge you to go and lie down."

Old Nannon came round from the foot of the bed. Thérèse hesitated, half turned to the door, then back again towards the motionless figure. At such a time the first departure seems almost a cruelty to the dead. M. Deshoulières laid his hand on her arm. "Come," he said, decidedly.

He led her into the adjoining *salon*, and closed the door of communication, but instead of leaving him, as he anticipated, she walked to the window and looked out at the fresh sweet morning, at the lights that were flooding the yellow stone of the Cathedral. It was all very solemn and tranquil as yet, although the town was just wakening to life. There was nothing harsh, nothing that seemed to jar upon the quiet repose of the figure that indeed should never more be vexed by earth's discordant din. Thérèse stayed there, and looked out for some minutes. It may be that she was gaining courage to speak, for when she turned round her voice was a little tremulous.

"Before I go, will you, who have been so good a friend to us, tell me whether my poor uncle spoke of—of Fabien, his nephew?"

"M. Fabien Saint-Martin? But certainly. He spoke much of him."

"Ah!"

"Permit me in my turn, mademoiselle, to ask from you whether you will be able to give us any

information as to where Monsieur Saint-Martin is to be found?"

"You do not know? Surely he said!"

"On the contrary, he refused to answer, when we questioned him. I had fears, I confess, but yet I hoped you would have been able to enlighten us."

"But I cannot, I cannot! That was the secret he kept from me. Oh, monsieur, he has not carried it to the grave!"

She was more moved than she had been yet. She turned impatiently from the light, not crying, but with eyes full of trouble. M. Deshoulières, who did not understand her suppressed emotion, thought it was the result of the scene she had gone through. She looked at him as if he must know why these words of his were so terrible to her, but he did not know. He put her down as tired and sad, and therefore fanciful.

"Go and rest yourself," he said decidedly. "You may be sure we shall soon learn all we want."

"You do not know him," she said. "He was so — inflexible," the word was spoken after a pause, as though a remembrance of the still face on the pillow prevented her from using a harsher one. "Poor Fabien! He went away partly in a rage, partly in disgrace. I think it was to

America, but even that I scarcely know. My uncle would tell no one — me least of all," she added under her breath, so that the doctor did not hear.

"How long ago?"

"Two years."

Seeing that she did not move, M. Deshoulières, in the flush of annoyance at his own position, could not avoid alluding to it. "By a strange and a most undesirable arrangement, I am to act as trustee for the property, until it can be made over to M. Saint-Martin. It will be necessary that Monsieur Roulleau and I go without delay to Château Ardron. There you may be sure we shall hear some tidings."

Thérèse shook her head despairingly.

"If he told you nothing himself, you will not hear of my cousin at Ardron."

M. Deshoulières thought her perverse. He would not permit such a possibility to take root in his mind. He went home through the quaint crooked streets, all bathed in the delicious freshness of a spring morning, — streets with old arched doorways, bits of bold carving, clambering vines, and overhead a sky broken into tender pearly tints, beneath which the blue was deepening every hour. People were already about, standing on the top of doorsteps, plodding off to their work:

they stared curiously at the doctor, guessing that he was on his way home from the Cygne, and wondering whether the tragedy was over. No one ventured to address him, he looked too grave and preoccupied. He was inwardly wroth with himself for having yielded, and yet he knew very well that if the whole thing were to be repeated he should yield again. What was to become of Thérèse? where was she to live? He caught sight of a dull gray wall, and remembered with some satisfaction that there was a convent in the town to which it was possible she might choose to retire. He could not help thinking that such a course would be the best she could take. "However," reflected M. Deshoulières, dismissing the subject with a sigh of perplexity, "we shall know better after I have been to Ardron."

Ardron still seemed the goal where things were to be made clear, when he and little Roulleau started for it on the day after the funeral. Thérèse was at the notary's house, — a temporary arrangement which relieved the doctor of some anxiety. To reach their end required a journey of some hours, at first through the great sunny corn plains, then by a cross line into a more diversified country, where was pasture-land and great trees, under which the cattle stood lazily content, and where, at last, they stopped at a little station bright with flowers, and embowered in acacias.

A bloused porter answered their inquiries. "Château Ardron, messieurs? That road — provided you keep continually to the right — will lead you there in less than a quarter of an hour."

M. Deshoulières walked quickly; he was anxious to put an end to his uncertainties; the notary had some difficulty in keeping up with him. Monsieur Roulleau, who was always haunted by a fear of accidents, wore a yellow straw hat, and carried a huge umbrella to ward off sunstroke.

The sun was certainly hot, but a soft breeze rustled through the copse: by and by they came to a little hill, and then to a turn in the road. "We shall find the house there," said the doctor, quickening his pace. He was right. On the top of a mound, stiffly planted on either side with trees, stood an unmistakable château of the ugliest modern type. It was built of red brick which time had not yet touched or mellowed, and faced with broad belts of white stone; the windows were numerous, and set thickly together, like those of a manufactory; at either end of the front was a small edifice, to represent a tower, and in the centre a little pretentious lantern.

"As I expected," said M. Deshoulières, with a grimace which the notary did not see. "Now for the inside, all gilt and satin."

All gilt and satin it was: the notary was raptur-

ous in his admiration. "It might have been in the upholsterer's shop yesterday," he said, in a fervor of enthusiasm. The finery struck the doctor as looking more desolate and melancholy in this uninhabited house than the most threadbare furniture could have done. The rooms stared unmeaningly at the daylight, as the old woman who lived there with her husband threw back the shutters, and caught off the covers. Every thing seemed new, gay, and heartless. One room upstairs was different from the others. It was richly but more simply furnished: little things about it appeared to resist the general cold formality of the house. It had a delicate paper, pictures, a pretty little alcove hung with muslin.

"The room of mademoiselle," said the old woman, pushing back the *persiennes*, and letting in a flood of warm sunlight. M. Deshoulières held back his companion at the door, and would not go in.

Thérèse was right, he began to fear. There were desks, papers, letters, at the château, but no information about M. Saint-Martin. Every thing was carefully and methodically arranged: only this one item was wanting, which in M. Deshoulières' eyes outweighed all the rest. Old Mathieu and his wife, who knew nothing of their master's death, were full of wonder, compassion, and, above

all, anxiety about their own future. To them there were no dismals at Château Ardron, only a warm kitchen, plenty of firewood, a roof over their heads, a little monthly instalment of francs. Monsieur Moreau had dismissed all the servants soon after his wife's death, had shut up his grand château, and gone away with Thérèse. It seemed as if a fit of restlessness had seized him. The poor old people, who had no restlessness, wanted to be assured that they would not lose their home, and when they understood this, they cheered up again at once. M. Deshoulières wondered whether M. Moreau had one mourner in the world. It seemed as if he had built his own prison-house, a wall of hard unloving words and deeds, in the midst of which he had died.

The little notary was hard at work among the papers, tying up bundles, and sealing them, when M. Deshoulières rang the bell for the old couple to answer his questions about Fabien. They knew even less than he expected. They had heard of him, without doubt, but he had never been at Ardron since M. Moreau hired them, and no one found it agreeable to mention his name when it enraged his uncle to such a degree. The notary, who had been glancing over letters, placed a couple in the doctor's hands.

"They give no information, I fear; but I con-

ceive it my duty to ask you to read every thing in which M. Fabien's name appears," he said with an air of profound caution.

Two boyish letters, written from school, and containing but few words. They were tied up carefully, and had evidently been much read. Was this the one human love that could have reached the hard cold man in his prison-house? There were more letters in another packet of slight importance, but all preserved; the last was dated two years and a half ago, during an apparently temporary absence from Rouen, and alluding to the purchase of Ardron.

"And there are no more?" inquired the doctor.

"No more," answered M. Roulleau, after a momentary pause. "That is to say, I should prefer your assuring yourself on the matter. Here are the papers in order."

M. Deshoulières applied himself to the task. The two men sat there reading, arranging, making notes, now and then saying a few words, until the afternoon was far advanced. "There is nothing," exclaimed the doctor, pushing back his chair impatiently. "Was there ever such a predicament!"

"There is nothing, as you say," assented the notary, slowly. "After all, the property is in good hands."

"Do not talk about it," M. Deshoulières said testily. "One would suppose you thought it a fine thing. There is the village still, and the curé. We may hope for something from him."

In the village — which lay about a league behind the château, and to which the doctor and the little notary walked, under a sweet, grave, evening sky, through trees in which the nightingales were singing with all their might — in the village there were enough surmises offered to them to account for the disappearance of half a hundred nephews; but no facts. Monsieur Fabien desired to see life — Monsieur Fabien could not have his own will — he was, doubtless, an emigrant in America — in the Mauritius — he was with the army in Algeria — he was amassing a fortune among the English — he was a missionary in China. M. Deshoulières was too impatient to sift the trifles which were poured into his ear; M. Roulleau professed himself at his wit's end. It made quite a little sensation at Ardron to know that these strangers had brought news of Monsieur Moreau's death, and were seeking tidings of Monsieur Saint-Martin. The rumor travelled up to the presbytère, and Monsieur le Curé was prepared when old Jeanneton came hobbling in, to say that two gentlemen were asking to speak with him. He had an instinctive aversion to strangers, and

the welcome he accorded was not particularly gracious. As they sat in the little humbly furnished room, with the curé listening to his story with a grim, unsympathizing face, M. Deshoulières thought he had never before entirely realized the disagreeables of his position. Whenever a question was put to him, the curé slightly raised his shoulders or shook his head. There was an air of doubt about the manner in which he received every detail, which irritated the doctor almost beyond bearing. He had never seen M. Fabien. It was possible that he had been at Ardron. The extraordinary terms of the will struck him as incomprehensible in a person of M. Moreau's solidity. Did he understand them to say that they had already searched the papers at the château without success? Had the two gentlemen before him undertaken the task unaided?

"Monsieur le Curé is not perhaps aware that I have the honor of belonging to the legal profession," put in the little notary, smoothly.

A dry cough was the curé's only answer. When the doctor said hotly, that they were departing from the subject on hand, he got up, clasped his hands behind his back, looked M. Deshoulières full in the face, and said —

"Unquestionably this difficulty must have greatly disarranged monsieur. I regret exceedingly to have no information to offer on the matter."

"Not even a suggestion?" inquired the doctor, after a blank pause.

"*Pardon.* You may call the police to your aid, or you may insert an appeal in the journals."

"Both means were expressly forbidden by the will, on such serious conditions for M. Saint-Martin that I do not feel justified in adopting them. To do so would be to reduce his fortune to 40,000 francs."

"In that case—" the curé concluded with a shrug.

The doctor strode away from the presbytère in great wrath. "Dolts! idiots!" he muttered, swinging along with the great steps little Roulleau found it difficult to follow. "No one can so much as use their eyes and ears in this abominable place. To return to Charville as we came is an absurdity not to be thought of."

Nevertheless, it was all that remained to be done. They did not reach the château until the moon had risen, throwing cold lights upon the formal vases on the terrace, the empty basins of the *jets-d'eau.* The nightingales had ceased, it was all quiet and a little oppressive. The house stood up before them, ugly still when no more than its form could be seen; outside the door old Mathieu and his wife had placed two chairs, where they were sitting waiting for the return of the gentlemen. Monsieur

Saint-Martin's discovery was no desirable matter in their eyes. It was an affair which they thought should be left to arrange itself, and meanwhile Château Ardron was a very comfortable home for their old age. M. Roulleau, meditating upon it, fancied that the information M. Deshoulières requested them to seek for, would not be sought with overmuch eagerness.

"The country is well rid of such *vauriens*," grumbled the old woman to him confidentially, as he pulled off the yellow bandana he had tied round his throat for fear of the night air, and made her stand by while he satisfied himself that his bed was dry. "Leave them alone. They will come back only too soon."

"You forget, Mère Bourdon, you forget," said the notary, shaking his head mildly, "if M. Saint-Martin were to return, he would take the château into his own hands. There would be gay doings. The whole neighborhood would benefit."

"The saints forbid!" said Mère Bourdon fervently, under her breath. Such a change of affairs would turn herself and old Mathieu out into the cold. She thought of their draughty little hut and shivered. Three out of the four who slept at Château Ardron that night were clearly of opinion that M. Fabien Saint-Martin would do well to remain a mystery.

Early in the morning M. Deshoulières was in the village again, but he added nothing to his meagre stock of information. He came back through the rain — for the weather had changed in the night — vexed and troubled, and inclined to blame the notary for not suggesting a better plan of operations. The country people going off to market, bumping along in carts, or under enormous umbrellas walking sociably with their pigs or their calves, all bade him good day; there was a sort of impression already abroad that here was the real master of the château. Old Mathieu and his wife scraped and bowed and wished "*bon voyage*" a dozen times when the two went away to the railway station. M. Deshoulières in his annoyance was disposed to consign the château, the village, and its inhabitants, including the curé, to the bottom of the sea. When they were in the train he took from a bag a bundle of the papers they had brought with them, and buried himself in them.

"It is inconceivable," he said at last.

The notary, who had apparently been sleeping, opened his eyes with a wondering "*comment?*"

"It is inconceivable that in all those papers there should be nothing relating to this nephew of a later date than the letters we discovered."

Roulleau shrugged his shoulders. "What will you?" he replied. "The man was, without doubt,

an eccentric. They had quarrelled, and he showed his displeasure by obliterating whatever related to the time and cause of their quarrel."

"His displeasure? Hum," said the doctor, "it looks more like wounded affection. I wish, with all my heart, his eccentricities had not vented themselves upon me. Well, there is no more to be said. 'Patience, and shuffle the cards.' We must wait. But, pray, where is Mademoiselle Veuillot to wait?"

"You have to provide her with a home?"

"Precisely. And where?"

"Would it be possible for Mademoiselle to remain where she is?" suggested the notary, doubtfully.

"At your house? My excellent Monsieur Roulleau, is such an arrangement practicable?"

"There are drawbacks, certainly. But I would do any thing to assist you in such an emergency."

"Let me hear the drawbacks."

"There is my wife. She is admirable — she is devoted — a paragon!" exclaimed the little notary, enthusiastically, "nevertheless, monsieur, she is a woman, and women are but human."

"Is that peculiarity confined to them?" asked M. Deshoulières, dryly. "Go on, M. Ignace, I fully comprehend that you must consult your wife."

"Monsieur is too considerate. The other drawback I am averse to mentioning. Alas, it is not every one who can follow the dictates of his heart — the sum bequeathed by Monsieur Moreau is so trifling, so inadequate."

"I will double it," promptly replied the doctor. "So long as Mdlle. Veuillot remains in your house, and is supplied with all that is necessary and fitting, I will undertake to pay you twice the sum named by Monsieur Moreau. When the heir comes, of course he will take the arrangements in his own hands."

"Without doubt, without doubt," said Roulleau, quickly. "You are generous indeed, monsieur. When the young lady is aware of what you have done in her behalf — "

"She will be aware of nothing," M. Deshoulières interrupted with decision. "The money matters do not go beyond us. You will find out from Madame Roulleau whether the arrangement is agreeable to herself, and if it meets with no opposition from Mademoiselle Veuillot, it may be considered an affair settled. I shall go to sleep with a mind relieved."

When M. Deshoulières was asleep, the little notary took out a pocket-book, looked at the superscription of two letters, each addressed to

M. Moreau, Château Ardron, and replaced them in his pocket with a grimace of satisfaction.

"Zénobie will acknowledge that I have arranged this little matter well," he said to himself, triumphantly. "If only this damp does not injure my chest!"

CHAPTER IV.

"As is the woodbine's, so the woman's life."
The Lost Tales of Miletus.

M. DESHOULIÈRES had lived nearly forty years in the world. He still wanted three or four years of that age, it is true, but he looked more, and perhaps this was the reason that he was in the habit of thinking of himself in round numbers as a man of forty. All his life had been comparatively solitary. He was an only child; his mother died while he was at a *lycée;* his father married again; the son had gone out into the world, worked, risen, now he stood high in his profession, and had been pressed by his colleagues to give up the provinces and betake himself to Paris. Why he had not followed their advice he scarcely knew. No tie specially bound him to Charville, but, somehow, he had struck root in the strange old town, — there was always some case in which he was interested, something that kept him from moving. The man was too simple-minded, perhaps, to care for the city life which just stayed within

the horizon of his thoughts, and never grew any nearer. He did not think enough about himself to be ambitious. And with his noble, kindly nature, always giving out of its abundance to others, he had lived all these years without any peculiar interest of his own; had lived until certain little habits, and fancies, and opinions had grown upon him, — a dread of women, a love of solitude, somewhat of a dislike to any thing that took him out of his ordinary work. All that had happened in the past week was peculiarly distasteful to him. Here was a girl thrown upon his care, and perhaps an endless sea of troubles rising out of the unwelcome charge; here was a mystery, and he hated mysteries with all his heart; here were already looks, hints, surmises. "By and by they will say that I poisoned the old man," reflected the doctor, with a grim laugh. He was not accustomed to have his word doubted; this suspicious curé's little drop of bitterness vexed him more than he confessed even to himself: it was a sort of forerunner of the world's opinion; and the world's opinion affects us all in some degree, say what we will to the contrary.

Therefore when little Roulleau made his cautious proposal about Mademoiselle Thérèse, M. Deshoulières jumped at it as an escape from one difficulty. He had been thinking where he could

place her, without much satisfaction having grown out of his thoughts, but, oddly enough, the Roulleau household had not presented itself. It was respectable, inoffensive; there was that wife, certainly, but M. Deshoulières had a kind of half-shaped theory that women could not be so objectionable towards women as towards men, — there was no reason that Madame Roulleau should drive Thérèse as she drove Ignace; nay, more than once in that little expedition to Ardron he had felt inclined to sympathize with Madame. Every now and then his wishes wandered longingly away towards that still safer refuge, a convent; if Thérèse could only feel a vocation in that direction she might be placed at once with the good Sisters in the town. Then his responsibility would be at an end. M. Deshoulières devoutly wished it might be brought to so happy a conclusion.

A little soft patter of rain was falling as the two men walked from the station to M. Roulleau's abode; the young leaves looked a brighter green, the sky had blue patches here and there between the gray; it was one of those spring showers which are full of life and fragrance. Sleepy, picturesque Charville lay and drank it in contentedly; little shallow pools twinkled in the hollows of the excavated house, out of which the workmen were dragging old memories. At the corner, watching

them, stood old Nannon: the doctor nodded to her and hurried on, — he wanted to get over this business, to return to his patients. After all, he reflected, the predicament was too absurd to last long. Monsieur Fabien would speedily appear, receive his property, remove himself and his perplexities from the doctor's mind. Charville would resume its usual peacefulness, its inhabitants come into the world, marry, go out of it again; the Cathedral chimes ring their varying notes; M. Deshoulières take his coffee under the stiff trees before the *café;* the women gossip volubly round the stone fountain on their way from market. All should be as it had been before M. Moreau came to trouble Charville with his strange bequest.

But Thérèse?

When M. Deshoulières entered the little, bare, unadorned room in the Roulleau's house — its master having left him at the door to confer with his wife upon the question of the girl's remaining with them — Thérèse was standing by the table, eagerly watching the door, and the doctor's heart was touched by the wistful gray eyes, which read his failure in a moment, and sank. She looked so helpless, so young to be left in this strange friendless condition. He went up to her kindly and took her hand.

"We are as we were," he said, answering the

look, "but what then? He will come in good time; do not despond. I was not made for police work; and as for Ignace Roulleau, he can creep along on the beaten track, but take him out of it, bah! he is of no more use than a child. We must have patience; something will arise; news will come."

"Do you think so?" Thérèse said, wearily.

"I am confident," he answered.

When she looked up at him he was smiling kindly upon her. Her youth, her forlornness, those pathetic eyes, all touched him more than he imagined. His big chivalrous man's heart answered at once their mute appeal.

"News will come," he repeated, positively. "Monsieur Saint-Martin will appear himself some day."

"Some day!" cried Thérèse, with a harsh ring of anguish in her voice. "Yes, yes, he will come some day, perhaps — but when? Oh, and the days are so long!"

She flung herself down by the table and hid her face on her arms; her figure shook, her rapid breathing was broken by sobs. M. Deshoulières looked at her in amazement. Hitherto she had been so quiet that this passionate outbreak startled him. He began to wonder vaguely whether M. Fabien was more to her than her uncle's nephew —

whether the banishment had any thing to do with the gray eyes of Mademoiselle Thérèse? but the moment after he smiled at his own fancy. Had it been so she would have known at once where to find him. M. Deshoulières was little acquainted with women, it is true, and with the acknowledgment there came a little devout ejaculation of gratitude; but he knew enough to have a profound conviction that were this suspicion correct, not all the uncles in the world would have prevented M. Fabien at the Antipodes and Mademoiselle Thérèse in France from communicating with each other. Perhaps what he did know was owing more to romances read in his boyhood than to actual experience. He had lived too busy a life, he would have said, to have had time for watching or making out for himself dreams of that kind. And yet at the bottom of his heart he had a vast, almost childish belief in the power of love. He put away that idea almost angrily, and went and stood by the window until poor Thérèse recovered herself. Naturally she was overdone, upset; that explained it all. He waited patiently, considering all the sick people with whose interests Ardron had interfered; and he looked out of the dull little window at the little that could be seen — the wet blank wall opposite, over the top of which a few garden trees waved feebly backwards

and forwards; a cart drawn by stout horses with blue thick woollen fringes on their huge collars, which jerked and rumbled over the uneven stones. Presently, through the rattle, he became aware that Thérèse, sitting upright and keeping her tearful eyes turned away, was speaking.

"I beg your pardon," she said once or twice over again, as if she could not get any further.

M. Deshoulières came and sat down by her. There was the same kindness in his eyes, if only Thérèse had looked at them, but his voice was a little quick and peremptory. He had no time to waste in unnecessary words.

"Is there really nothing more that you can tell me about Monsieur Saint-Martin?" he asked.

"Nothing of the present," said Thérèse, slowly.

"Well, of the past, then?"

"What did you hear at Ardron?"

"Nothing."

"Ah, that is no wonder," said Thérèse, speaking with a little more animation. "The people at Ardron scarcely know Fabien; we have been there such a little time, you see. We used to live at Rouen — my uncle, my aunt, Fabien, and I. Fabien has always lived with them; my uncle loved him better than any one else in the world. I went to Rouen when my father and mother died, that was eleven years ago," said Thérèse, consid-

ering; "I was nine years old and Fabien was fourteen."

"And your aunt took you?"

"Yes. Poor aunt Ferdinande! she tried to be kind; and my uncle was generous — very generous. He despised women, though, monsieur, and he never professed to like me. Is it not strange that, after all, I should have been the only one left to him now?"

She spoke in a questioning dreamy sort of way, clasping her hands over her knee, and looking out of the window at the dropping rain. There was a certain easy grace in her attitude, in the curves of her figure, in the poise of her head. Monsieur Deshoulières was not noticing it, he glanced at the timepiece instead and fidgeted.

"Then, as I understand, M. Moreau intended his nephew to enter his house at Rouen?" he asked.

"Oh, he had entered it," Thérèse cried quickly; "he had entered and was doing admirably when — "

"Well, when — ?"

" — They had a disagreement."

"Ah, a disagreement, On matters connected with money?"

M. Deshoulières thought he was pursuing the examination with great skill; he did not notice the troubled appealing glance which poor Thérèse threw at him before answering slowly, —

"Not altogether."

"On business, then? It is much the same thing. Five-eighths of the world permit such matters to wreck their lives. And so the old man was angry, and M. Saint-Martin went off in a headstrong fit?"

Poor Thérèse wanted very much to tell her little story — the old, old story — more commonplace even than M. Deshoulières', yet so new, so beautiful, in her eyes. But how could she? He was so terribly prompt and abrupt, he would not see what she meant, would not help her, his quick manner frightened her, her education had taught her reserve, she needed sympathy to draw out little by little what it was so hard to say in words; after all, it was not necessary that she should relate her share in the matter. She said, sighing, —

"The two disagreed, monsieur, as you say."

"And so the young man acted in this wise fashion?"

"It was not Fabien's fault. It was his uncle who was angry. Fabien had done nothing wrong."

Her whole attitude changed; her throat curved, her eyes kindled; evidently she was prepared to do battle for the absent if the opportunity came. M. Deshoulières, however, had relapsed into silence, his elbows on his knees, his hands thrust into his hair. Looking up at last, he suddenly said, —

"And you mean to say that you do not know where he went?"

"No," she answered, steadily.

"Your aunt, Madame Moreau, has not been dead many months; do you suppose that she was as strangely ignorant?"

"I do not know — I cannot tell," said Thérèse, with agitation.

"But you have an idea," said M. Deshoulières, fixing his keen eyes upon her, and frowning unconsciously.

"From something she once let drop I fancied he was in America, but when I begged and prayed her to tell me she became so terrified at her own imprudence that I could not find out any thing more. She was in great awe of my uncle. He never mentioned poor Fabien, except once, when—"

She stopped short, tears gathered in her eyes.

"Well?" said Deshoulières, impatiently.

"— When he showed me a scrap of writing, evidently torn off a letter, and containing only two lines."

M. Deshoulières said, "Well?" once more.

Thérèse turned and looked at him reproachfully. She thought him cruel, hard. He was trying to befriend her after his own fashion, but she found it difficult to believe. There are sore places in our hearts which others touch all unconsciously, and

when the pain darts through us we feel as if they must know something of what they are doing.

"They were bitter words," she said, her voice faltering. "'I renounce for ever my country, and the friends I left there.'"

"Bah!" said M. Deshoulières, irreverently.

The girl flashed round upon him.

"You do not know Fabien!"

"Who were his friends?" he asked, without noticing her little outburst. And then Thérèse glanced shyly at him, and calmed down. Here was his best friend if this man would only understand. But he was terribly prosaic, he would not understand. His questions travelled relentlessly along the great dusty high road of facts, while her thoughts danced away from them into sweet little flowery meadows, river-banks, a sunny dream-land of what might have been, what might be yet. In spite of her trouble, an irrepressible smile quivered on her lips, which would have puzzled the doctor, had he seen it. She answered demurely that the only two of whom she knew were a certain Léon Fauchet, whom she believed to have entered the army; and Claude Lamourette, who went out to China within a few weeks of Fabien's departure.

It was all unsatisfactory, provoking. Even the doctor's impatient spirit was forced to acknowledge that nothing could be done for the present. His

hands were tied by the terms of the will, he could only wait and trust that such little strings as he had set going would some day tug M. Fabien Saint-Martin into Charville.

Without any particular reason for the feeling, he disliked him heartily, but, nevertheless, it was to be hoped he would come and deliver them from this tangle of perplexities. There was no more to be said about Fabien in this interview, but Thérèse's future remained to be settled. M. Deshoulières fidgeted and fussed on his chair.

"Is this house agreeable to you? Would you like to stay?" he said at last, shooting out the words quite suddenly. Thérèse, who had been the one most troubled in the conversation, grew self-possessed when she found her own prospects under consideration.

"Do you mean, like to live here?" she asked. "It would do as well as any other place."

"You would not prefer the convent?"

"Oh, Monsieur, not — not the convent!" she exclaimed, with all the trouble returning. Her gray eyes dilated, she put out her hands imploringly.

"No one will force you," said M. Deshoulières, in a kind, reassuring voice, but he did not understand this sudden terror. Looking upon it as a natural retreat for unmarried girls, he had thought

it not unlikely she might herself suggest it. He was sorry that she shrank from it, and it surprised him a little. Nevertheless, had she but known it, she was quite safe from any attempt to thwart her inclinations; but she did not know it. Her early experience of her uncle's unrelenting will led her to expect everywhere the same harshness, the same determination. What M. Deshoulières had once suggested he might at any time attempt to oblige her to follow out; and to be buried in a convent, to lose all hope of seeing Fabien, of hearing a word here, a word there, a rumor of his whereabouts — to lose this was to twenty-year old Thérèse like losing life itself. She would have preferred any hardship to this prospect, which had hung over her while her uncle lived, and was, probably, only prevented from taking shape by a certain half contemptuous indulgence of his wife's wishes, and after her death by a softening consciousness of his own failing health. Now it surged up before her again; M. Deshoulières' words could not calm her fears.

"Only let me stay here," she entreated.

He looked at her a little keenly. It was something new to have any one dependent upon him, half pleasant, half puzzling — then he thought of his patients and jumped up.

"That is soon settled, mademoiselle; I will

speak to Madame Roulleau, and then you can arrange things as you please. Pardon me now, for my time is not my own."

There were no difficulties with the Roulleaus; M. Deshoulières went away from the house rather pleased with his own management. Thérèse was provided for, for the present; he had satisfied himself upon one or two points, had learned also that she did not care for Fabien. Poor stupid, blind Max!

Monsieur and Mme. Roulleau lost no time in going to Thérèse when once the doctor had quitted the house; madame led the way of course, but she was a little changed to Thérèse, as the latter saw at once. Hitherto she had been almost cringing in her manner, now she had the air of one who permits herself to be persuaded against her better judgment. She was a woman of about fifty, with a sharp, puckered face, a nose pinched and slightly hooked, a long upper lip, black hair strained tightly backwards, and hands which were long, lean, covetous-looking. Some people's hands take you into their owner's secrets, before their faces have let out any thing. Mme. Roulleau's were of this kind. You might notice a stretching, a little involuntary curve of the fingers' ends, as if they longed to be grasping something. It struck Thérèse again as she stood before her in the middle

of the room in a kind of linen jacket, drawn in round the waist, and the girl hardly understood at first that M. Roulleau was speaking, she could not help watching madame's hands with a sort of fascination. M. Roulleau coughed and spoke a little louder.

"Our excellent friend, Monsieur Deshoulières, has made a proposal, mademoiselle, I had the pleasure to observe, which would relieve him, he says, from an embarrassment. Without doubt he has confided it to you. Now, madame and I could receive no pleasure so profound, so grateful to our hearts," continued the little man, becoming suddenly enthusiastic, "as that we should experience by assisting our excellent doctor to the very extent of our means; but—"

"This is impossible," said madame, sharply.

"*Mon amie!*" remonstrated the notary, with an appealing gesture.

"Impossible!" reiterated Mme. Roulleau. "I know you, Ignace; you are as weak as an infant over your ideas of friendship; but I am a mother. I think of my Adolphe, of my Octavie, defenceless little ones! I cannot consent to burden our family with another load. Mademoiselle must seek a home elsewhere."

Thérèse started like a guilty thing. Up before her rose the grim walls of the convent, Fabien

seeking her outside, she shut in, separated, unconscious of his neighborhood. Peace might be there — repose; her untrained heart cried out passionately for other things. "There is the convent," said madame, watching her. She had heard from M. Deshoulières how his suggestion had been received.

"Let me stay here. Do not send me away," said poor Thérèse, with imploring eyes.

"It is not my heart," answered madame, trying to be pathetic; "it is the cost, the extras we must provide."

"I can live upon so little," urged the girl, turning towards the little notary.

"Zénobie!" he exclaimed, as if with a sudden impulse, "it is useless — I must yield!"

"Imprudent man!" replied madame, keeping up the little farce with great vigor; "do you forget our miserable means?"

"I forget nothing. We must stint ourselves — I know it. Adolphe and Octavie must suffer — I know it. What then? When friendship and compassion call, I cannot shut my heart. Mademoiselle, you have conquered. Remain."

He spoke with a grandly tragic air. Thérèse relieved, astonished, all at once, could not credit her ears. It seemed impossible that the little man should assert himself in this manner against his

wife, who cast up her hands, and cried out again at his imprudence. She tried to murmur thanks, but M. Roulleau, in his unwonted energy, waved them aside.

"There is one point," he went on, "in which I am sure mademoiselle's delicacy of feeling will unite with our own. It would desolate Mme. Roulleau and myself, were our admirable M. Deshoulières to have any idea of the difficulties this little arrangement may entail upon us. Whatever the world may say, he has not the means to assist as his generous heart would desire, yet without a question he would insist upon doing so. What then? The contest would lacerate us, we should not consent; mademoiselle would again have to seek a home. No, no, our friends may blame us —bah! one must follow impulse sometimes!"

"How good you are to do this!" Thérèse cried out gratefully. She had a generous heart, and it smote her for not having sufficiently valued the little man. When the two had gone away, monsieur still heroic, and madame injured, she felt as if a great dread had gone with them. Her heart sang a little song without words — a song all about Fabien, and constancy, and meeting. Wonderful things grew up before her; sober people would have laughed or cried, as the case might be, could they have heard her music. Thérèse was in that

enchanter's castle, wherein most of us wander for a little while, at some time or other, listening to the songs which are never sung so sweetly elsewhere.

CHAPTER V.

"Lo, as some innocent and eager maiden
Leans o'er the wistful limit of the world,
Dreams of the glow and glory of the distance,
Wonderful wooing and the grace of tears,
Dreams with what eyes and what a sweet insistance
Lovers are waiting in the hidden years."

F. W. H. Myers.

THÉRÈSE was really grateful to the Roulleaus for their concession, grateful and a little touched by what seemed honest delicacy of feeling. Madame Roulleau, who could dig like a mole when she wanted to find out a character, had been digging and burrowing while her husband was at Ardron, and knew pretty well by this time what strings to pull. People who have this sort of shrewdness can see a good deal without going far down; she did not reach the depths, but she was quite satisfied. It was not worth her while to study all the complexities of the girl's nature, if she had tried doing so she would have had a baffling task, for there were plenty of contradictions about it. Probably Thérèse's education had some-

thing to do with all the contrarieties and incongruities which met you at every turn — she was tender and hard, resolute and timid, generous and distrustful; it was impossible to know which of the opposing qualities would come uppermost: a great hopefulness, perhaps, impressed you the most. It was not insensibility to, but an inborn dread of the sadnesses of life which made her cling to the bright side. In spite of what they may say, there are people who find a certain sort of enjoyment in trouble, they like to be made to weep over fictitious distresses, there is a chord in them which responds at once to any call for sympathy. Thérèse was not one of these people to whom we turn in our sorrows, sure at least of being understood, if we are not helped. As yet she was impatient of sorrow, eager for happiness. She hated tragedies, sad books, minor music. As I have said, it was not that such things did not touch her — perhaps if she had been indifferent she would not have minded them so much — but her nature rose up in rebellion against them: they were part of Adam's curse. She had not learned that, after all, through the Infinite Love that uses sorrow and suffering for instruments, they have caught a Divine beauty, a sweet solemn loveliness which by degrees reveals itself and wins our hearts. Thérèse believed only in one kind of

happiness — our wills gratified, our dreams realized, all the little idols we have set up smiling down upon us from their pedestals: as we go on in life we find out sometimes that it was well our idols were shattered for us, or we might have been crushed under their weight; but Thérèse had no fear of this. She thought of herself as if some day all her longings must be satisfied, her troubles ended and laid aside, every thing completed, rounded off, and perfect. After that, I think there came a golden haze. There is something half-pathetic, half-comforting, in this unlimited faith in coming happiness. We see where it fails, but every now and then it acts upon our wearier spirits like a breath of immortality.

Thérèse had already met with enough to daunt her in her little life, although it had not had that effect; she looked upon all the roughnesses of the road, so far, as things extraneous, and not altogether belonging to her existence. Whatever part of her they affected it was not her belief in the rose-colored days that were coming. That stood unshaken. Nor while it lasted could she be said to have lost her courage; yet it had grown to have a strange admixture of timidity since she went — a bold brave child — to live at Rouen. Her heart used to swell, and her cheeks flush, when M. Moreau was harsh to her aunt, to Fabien;

but her woman's nature, though it resented his treatment, quailed before it. Once or twice she had resisted him, but all the time she was terribly frightened. Poor Thérèse! she was only a girl, and he had every thing on his side except right, as she used to say to herself indignantly, half angry at her own weakness.

Madame Moreau was a large feeble woman, who scarcely ventured to think without her husband's permission. She was so passive under his provocations that you were inclined to wonder whether she had been so from the first, or whether, after he had frightened the spirit out of her, nature had avenged herself by giving her this impervious armor. Thérèse's little fiery outbreaks on her behalf were always wasted. They were much more appreciated by Fabien; he incited her to them, and she was too generous to notice that she was left to bear the consequences alone. He was her hero, over whom she rang her little changes of admiration: when he told her that he loved her, instead of formally beforehand requesting her hand from her uncle, she promised, with her gray eyes shining straight into his, and all her heart in her words, never to give him up. Fabien promised the same. "Every thing," says an old writer, "has a double handle, or at least we have two hands by which to apprehend it." I suppose it was so with this promise.

Then came the crash, and her hero went away, more of a hero than ever. In her thoughts Thérèse set a crown on his head, and turned him into one of the old champions. Fabien, who was thoroughly nineteenth-century, would have been utterly puzzled what to do with himself if her ideas had come true. And then, with her boundless store of hopefulness, of expectation, she did not find the waiting so weary as it looked. Every now and then, to be sure, there would surge up in her heart a wild longing, a yearning such as had broken out when M. Deshoulières spoke, the days would seem interminable, the distance from Fabien infinite. Such pangs came more acutely after M. Moreau had one day called her into his room.

"So you are still thinking of that ungrateful?" said the old man mockingly. "In that case you shall receive his latest news."

And then he showed her Fabien's lines of renunciation.

All the girl's fear of her uncle vanished: she lifted her head proudly. "When Fabien writes those words to me, I will believe them," she said, and went away, leaving old Moreau speechless at her presumption. It was her greatest victory among their encounters, but it was one of those victories which cost more than defeats. Not all her buoyancy could rise against the weight which

the words left in her heart. How could he write them? How could he? She used to put the question passionately, and then answer it with a hundred fond excuses. All must be right some day, — that was the creed to which she clung; could she only keep free from the convent walls, all must be right. When her aunt died, and she lost the one slender link to her uncle's affection, her dread of them increased; afterwards, through all the terrible time at the Cygne, she could not altogether repress the sense of liberty which came with the lifting from her the weight of that indomitable will. Whatever happened, she thought she must breathe more freely. She was not at all prepared to find M. Moreau's intentions echoed back by her new guardian. Madame Roulleau had taken care to impress her with an idea of his inflexible nature, and she began, in her ignorance, to dread that he might have the power to compel her to submit. Any fate seemed preferable, and Madame Roulleau was well aware that in taking her into her house, she might impose what terms she pleased.

At first there was not much laid upon her. She had a miserable little room, it is true, bare and dreary, but what then? "If mademoiselle expects another Château Ardron, she must not come to Rue St. Servan," said Madame, with her disagreeable smile. Thérèse hastened to explain that

no such discontented comparison had entered her head. She was in fact too young to care much for the want of comfort round her; she pulled the things about and spread out her little possessions, and wasted no repinings for the blue silk curtains, and the gilding, and the *ormolu* at Château Ardron. Out of her window, beyond the roofs, she could see one of the Cathedral spires, with its delicate stone fretwork; a great expanse of sky over the flat country round; the very roofs were too crooked, too full of quaint character, to be commonplace. She could make histories out of them, weave romances about the people who lived beneath them — romances into which her own story and Fabien's stole in some irrepressible way. It seemed like a little time of rest after all the harshness and unkind words of the last years. Surely some intuitive instinct would tell Fabien that she was alone in the world, and that no one need come between them now.

But in a little while she found she had no time for dreaming. Things seemed to fall upon her as a matter of course. Mme. Roulleau would come in with a great heap of clothes in her arms, her own, Adolphe's, Octavie's, for mademoiselle to exercise her powers of *reparation* upon. It was often very difficult to make out of them what madame expected; only Aladdin's magician with

his new lamps for old could have satisfied her, and poor Thérèse darned and turned and patched, and patched and turned and darned, in despair: more than once before she had learned her lesson of economy, she cut up her own things in a vain attempt to perform the impossible. If she could only have pleased by her efforts she would not have disliked the work; she was active-minded, glad to be of use, there would have been a certain enjoyment in her own ingenuity. And if Mme. Roulleau was capable of being touched she must have been conscious of the sweetness with which Thérèse took her rebuffs, the patience with which she tried to follow out her directions. They were the only weapons the girl brought forward at this time. But to certain natures there is nothing so dear as the power of petty tyranny, and neither the money paid by M. Deshoulières, nor the work she extracted from her, were so delightful to Madame Roulleau as the infliction of daily snubs upon Thérèse. Skilfully drawing out her desire to remain free and lead a secular life, skilfully playing upon her fears of a convent, imperceptibly strengthening her dread of M. Deshoulières' decisions, far more swift than he to fathom the secret of the girl's heart and to turn it to their purpose, she did her best to make Thérèse's life a burden.

And yet for a time, as I have said, Thérèse bore

it all not only with patience but with cheerfulness. She hoped bravely, and this was the elixir which prevented her feeling madame's sting. It was not pleasant to be found fault with, but she said to herself that it all came from her own stupidity, her want of knowledge about useful things. After all, they were useful, and it was very good for her to be forced into them. She preached vigorous little lectures over her own reluctance and want of gratitude. Monsieur and madame were not charming, certainly, but they had been very generous and only demanded a return. In those days her step was buoyant, her color bright, her gray eyes sparkling. Madame Roulleau used to look at her and say crossly to her husband,

"She has had some news of that *vaurien*."

The little notary used to get into a fever of alarm. "Zénobie," he would say, with his shrill voice quavering, "if he comes back we are ruined."

"He must not come back," said madame, quietly.

"Must not!" repeated the little man, querulously. "That is very fine, but who is to keep him away? It appears to me that there was never such a world as this for gossip. Instead of minding their own affairs, people talk, talk, like so many parrots, and who is to make sure that their mischievous tongues will not one day carry the news to the wrong person?"

His wife darted a contemptuous glance at him. "It is a lottery, as I told you before," she said coldly. "One or other must lose."

"And you talk of it so calmly! Do you know what a frightful risk I run? If M. Saint-Martin comes home, and the little hindrances I have put in his way are discovered — or if that girl finds out the double payment, I am ruined! I shudder when I think of it."

He was shuddering. It was a hot June day, and he shivered as if he had the ague. Madame looked at him with still the same expression in her face.

"You are a coward, Ignace," at last she said, letting her words drop slowly, "and that makes you a fool. Do you suppose that I have not weighed the risk? Do you suppose that I am not watching?"

Under her eyes he shivered more visibly. "I know," he said in a submissive voice; "I only thought —"

"Do not think," she interrupted contemptuously; "leave thinking to me."

"He might write to her," M. Roulleau muttered under his breath.

"What are you saying?"

"Do not be angry, Zénobie; I only remarked that he might write to her."

"Here?"

"No; to Château Ardron. In that case, *mon amie*," continued the little man, apologetically, "permit me to observe that the letter would be forwarded to Monsieur Deshoulières."

Madame sighed. "I do not think I shall ever be able to educate you," she said: "I must soon give it up. And you can actually assert that such a danger has only just struck you, and that all this time you have taken no precaution against it. *Hein!* look here!"

Her tone rose peremptory and shrill. M. Roulleau looked obediently at the copy of the letter she flourished before his eyes, and then admiringly at her.

"You are a marvel!" he said in his feeble, abject voice.

"I made her write it," she said, still shrilly.

"Bah, she is only too easy to manage, there is no satisfaction, one had but to work on her fears. Her letters will be sent here, and I think, monsieur, you will acknowledge that I can arrange who shall be the receiver?"

"I acknowledge every thing," he said, with a deprecating gesture.

"Perhaps you may be relieved to know," she continued, returning to her cold measured tones, "that I took further steps at the same time. It

would be inconvenient if other letters reached M. Deshoulières. I requested, therefore, in his name, that all documents which might arrive should be forwarded to you. By this means we control one channel of communication."

"But, Zénobie, my angel—"

"Well? more scruples?"

"You said in his name?"

"Exactly."

"But—suppose he should find it out?"

"In that case, and supposing also that you had not the wit to persuade him that such were his orders, our little enterprise is at an end. I have told you that there must be risk. Bah!" she continued, suddenly becoming fierce again, "you do not fear to be a villain, Ignace, provided you may have the profit without the danger. You can creep, but you cannot spring."

She did not look unlike a wild-cat herself, with her round black eyes sparkling, her hands making energetic passes in the air. M. Roulleau was in an agony lest any one should hear her imprudent words.

"Hush-h-h," he said tremulously, "I am not so clever as you, Zénobie, I do not affirm it. Only tell me what you would have me do."

"Do!" she cried in her high-pitched voice. And then, with one of those sudden strange checks by

which she controlled her passion, she changed back to her contemptuous manner. "You can never be any thing but what you are, but you may be useful in your own way. Do? Go and creep, Ignace."

CHAPTER VI.

"*Cori.* — I have been i' the market place;
. . . . .
. . . all's in anger."
Coriolanus.

OF all French towns, perhaps Charville is the most under female influence. I do not know how the power has grown up, or whether it is of any great antiquity, but it is so hard to conceive any thing modern in connection with the place, that one supposes it to have existed in remote ages. Women's rights in France are of a more muscular character than in England; women go out into the fields, dig, reap, and plough: it is a severe training, from which they come out brown and weather-beaten. There is plenty of such work in the great monotonous cornfields round Charville all the year round; but inside the town, a more important, and, in their eyes, a more honorable occupation, is intrusted to women. The measuring and selling the grain in the corn-market is carried on by a corporation of their number. They do

their work very quickly and efficiently. Their code of laws is of long standing, and seldom meets with a hitch. The owners leave all in their hands; in fact, their trustworthiness is so proverbial, that as soon might the character of a judge be assailed, as the honesty of one of this corporate body. Saturdays are the days when you may see the carts coming in from the farms laden with little golden grain: the Charville sleepiness seems to rouse itself into action; there is activity, energy, sometimes even a little spice of hurry. Those that enter the town at the lower suburb find it no easy matter to get up the narrow steep streets; the carts jolt and creak, the horses labor, while all the time there is an unceasing chorus of the sharp "Heep, heep!"

Inside the market, as I have said, matters move with all imaginable rapidity and gravity. The women receive the grain, weigh it, and the sale goes on so briskly that all is over before the end of an hour. Outside, in the Place, are a crowd of carts, people idling, old women standing about in their stuff gowns and snowy caps; the country people meet their relations; there is a din of good-humored chatter about the price of corn, the value of samples, the health of the bishop, the ambition of Madame the Préfet's wife, the chance of gaining a few *sous*, — all kinds of matters, great and small,

but rarely any more serious disturbance. Monsieur Deshoulières was surprised one morning as he passed through the Place to find himself the centre of a hubbub. Quite a crowd had gathered together at the entrance to the market — men and women with grave excited faces, a torrent of shrill voices. People looked out of their windows; the horses, standing unheeded in the carts, tossed their great manes, and stamped and shook themselves to get rid of the tormenting flies. The time when business usually concluded was past; it was evident that something still hindered it, something unusual.

"What is the matter?" asked M. Deshoulières, elbowing his way through a throng of women.

So many voices answered him that he lifted his low hat, and said, with an appealing gesture, "One at a time, if you please, mesdames."

"Such an affair has never before happened in our town."

"It is a scandal!"

"One will hear next that one sells short measure one's self!"

"Could monsieur conceive the audacity of that unhappy boy!"

"Madame Mathurine will assuredly apply to Monsieur le Maire."

Then they all began again. The doctor could

not understand it. He saw, however, that there were two parties, each enthusiastic for their own side; and from what he could gather out of the angry waves of talk, he suspected the town and country people were at variance. Old Nannon was passionately declaiming in the centre, alternately scolding her opponents and hugging a white-faced bullet-headed boy in a blouse who seemed the object of attack. A painter would have been pleased with the scene, there was so much color and animation about it. The houses looked as if each had its history: there were wonderful Gothic arches with great sombre depths, and above them, perhaps, a scarlet or purple flower flaming out of a window; a crowd, with its patches of indigo, olive green, and rich russets, all in harmony with the background; great white horses, carrying their monstrous collars; yellow corn going away to the water-mills, hot sunshine, striped awnings, pigeons flying up and down from the roofs, — while a clear atmosphere brought out all the tints and soft half-tones, so that it made a beautiful glowing picture. A fat, comfortably dressed farmer's wife had been leaning against the wall of the market, more silent than the rest; she pushed her companions on one side in the midst of the clatter of tongues, —

"*Tenez*," she said, decidedly. "I will explain the affair to monsieur."

"Is that you, Madame Lemaire?" said the doctor, with a little relief. "Now perhaps there is a chance that I may understand. What is hindering the business to-day? Is the market closed?"

"Mesdames are deliberating," replied Madame Lemaire in a slow, solid voice. "There has been an inconvenient event. The corn was brought in this morning from Gohon's, as usual, and delivered to Madame Mathurine. When she came to measure the grain, she found, as she says, three of the sacks deficient. She has a theory," continued Madame Lemaire, ponderously, "that the boy Jean-Marie, who drove the cart, could explain the matter if he chose. There are plenty to take his part, and plenty to take hers. *Voilà tout*, monsieur!"

There had been a slight lull in the din of voices, accorded to the position of the well-to-do farmer's wife, as she made this explanation. When she stopped it broke out again. Old Nannon had drawn near to listen, dragging the accused after her, and she took up the cudgels immediately.

"*Voilà tout*, madame remarks, but it shall not be all, I say. If Madame Mathurine supposes she is to take away the character of an innocent angel like this, she shall learn her mistake. Speak for thyself, Jean-Marie."

The innocent angel only answered by a howl. The bystanders laughed. Monsieur Deshoulières interposed, —

"What have you to do with him, Nannon?" he inquired.

"He is her sister's son." "He works for Monsieur Gohon," replied a chorus of shrill voices. At this moment the great doors were flung open, and the people poured into the market. It all looked gray, cool, business-like: sacks heaped about, great measures, a few men in blue blouses, and a small knot of women, in white frilled caps, and little crossed shawls, standing together in the midst. M. Deshoulières looked on with a little quiet amusement, wondering how the women would conduct themselves. A commotion in the corn market was almost unprecedented. Just then he saw a figure standing behind two others in the sunlit doorway. Something in form or attitude was so unlike the rest, that he looked again and recognized Thérèse. She had already noticed him, so that it did not surprise her when he came back to her and began, in his quick abrupt manner, —

"You here, mademoiselle?"

She drew back a little, seeing that he was displeased, and lifted her eyes to his face with the expression that always unconsciously touched him. It was quite true that a few months ago she would have shrunk from finding herself among people alone, but since her stay at the Roulleaus, madame had impressed upon her that she was no longer in

a position to hold such ideas; she made her useful in this as in every other respect, and Thérèse had been a little proud of overcoming the dislike which all French education and habits implant so strongly that it becomes second nature. She had been passing through the Place, and had paused for a moment at the entrance to the market, to look at the throng within. There the sunlight had betrayed her to M. Deshoulières. The idea of concealing herself from him, or from any one else, would never have entered her head, but now she wished heartily that he had not perceived her. When he went on to ask what had become of her attendant, poor Thérèse colored crimson with vexation.

"I have no *bonne*, monsieur," she answered as composedly as she could. "In my position I do not expect one."

It was M. Deshoulières' turn to color. He walked up to fat Madame Lemaire, who was standing near, and brought her back with a kind of ceremonious formality. "There has been a mistake about mademoiselle's servant," he said, hurriedly; "will you do me the kindness to permit her to remain under your protection?" Then he went a little aside from them, and stood watching the proceedings.

The women looked very grave and determined,

only Mme, Mathurine was a little pale. She was the most unpopular of her number among the country people, and a good many of them, without any real suspicion of her honesty, were not sorry to inflict a touch of humiliation. Old Nannon, in her wrath, said openly that she had lined her pockets with the price of the corn, and then accused the boy of bringing short measure. Others, who had not the old woman's personal interest in the matter, would not venture so far, they shook their heads, and shrugged their shoulders. The majority inclined to the belief that the boy had been tampered with, and had sold the grain before he reached the market; but Mme. Mathurine, who was proud and self-reliant, saw only the shakes and shrugs. She was obliged to appear composed and indifferent, but in her heart a fierce indignation was burning. She had made a little mistake in not having at once called one of the other saleswomen to witness the reality of the short measure, and even to have made a mistake was very bitter to her pride. She folded her arms and looked round upon the faces about her with the air of a queen.

"There is no more to be done, messieurs and mesdames," she said. "The business is concluded. Monsieur Gohon will communicate with the corporation, if he desires it."

"And our Jean-Marie?" asked Nannon, pressing up and looking warlike.

Madame Mathurine deigned no other answer than a withering glance. Her companions gathered round her; they made a little compact phalanx and moved towards the doors. Old Nannon followed, dragging her reluctant nephew, and pouring out a torrent of words, —

"I appeal to the commissary, — to the mayor," she cried, thrusting herself before Mme. Mathurine. M. Deshoulières began to think the old woman's rage would lead her to a personal attack upon her enemy, and the other saleswomen thought so too, for the eldest of the group, perceiving him, came quickly up and said in a low voice, —

"Pray, monsieur, use your influence to prevent scandal."

"Nannon," he said, sternly, "this must end. You have been allowed too much license already. So much as relates to the affair here is finished; for the rest, Jean-Marie and his master must settle it between them."

There was a little murmur of applause among the town-people, an honest admiration for their doctor made his opinion as decisive as the maire's. Nannon shook her head, and drew herself up with a certain pathetic dignity.

"That is easy to say, monsieur," she answered,

her poor old voice tremulous with indignation. "We all know the quantity was just when the corn left the farm, and if the poor boy goes back with this story, it does not require to be a witch to know that my sister will have him on her hands again."

Thérèse, standing rather behind fat Madame Lemaire, and her basket, was in a little flame of excitement. Her color rose, her eye sparkled, one or two people near looked at her with curiosity and admiration, but she did not remark it. She liked the old woman with her ugly, half comical, half pathetic face, and wanted her to be proved in the right; M. Deshoulières, who found himself, to his amusement, constituted a kind of judge, little knew what a warm partisan of the accused was watching him from the background with flashing eyes. He asked a few necessary questions; the sacks had been brought tied and marked as usual, the bill of the quantity delivered to Madame Mathurine, Jean-Marie stoutly denied any encounters on the road. M. Deshoulières felt convinced that he denied too much; old Nannon, on the contrary, was in triumph.

"Now monsieur sees that he is telling the truth!"

"That is just what he is not doing," said the doctor severely. "If he can give no other account of

himself, and Madame Mathurine does not call in the commissary of police, it will be Gohon's duty to do so. As for you, Nannon, you should know better than to encourage him."

"Oh, monsieur!"

Nannon's face was tragic. Thérèse was altogether on her side against M. Deshoulières' harshness. No one can be so unjust as a girl when her feelings are brought into the battle-field; Nannon's young champion would have ridden pell-mell over right and wrong, laws and principles, Madame Mathurine, and the whole corporation, in defence of this old woman with her foolish, unreasonable love. She detested M. Deshoulières when he said: —

"It is true. Listen to me, Jean-Marie. You shall have one chance more. Whom did you see on your road here to-day?"

Something came out which sounded like "the Simons and Michault." There was a murmur of indignation.

"Imagine the little wicked one vowing that he met no one!"

"Did monsieur conceive the road to be a desert?" said Nannon, drawing herself up defiantly.

"Where was Michault?" asked M. Deshoulières, disregarding.

"He was at Cottereau's."

Between obstinacy and fright it was difficult to extract the truth from the unhappy Jean-Marie, but the doctor's questions at last elicited the facts that he had been persuaded to enter the Cottereaus' cottage — one of those miserable huts which abound in the department — under pretence of receiving a commission from Mère Cottereau to buy some cotton yarn for her in Charville. Then it came out that Michault, who was sitting there, went away, the others gave the boy cider, and detained him for some time, while no doubt the theft was committed. The Cottereaus' character was well known in the district; it all seemed clear enough now that Jean-Marie acknowledged this much, and M. Deshoulières did not think the boy knew more. Notice would be given to the police, but it was not likely he would suffer from them. M. Deshoulières bestowed a few sharp words upon him, meaning all the while to say something to Gohon on his behalf. This neither Nannon nor Thérèse guessed; the old woman's foolish fondness provoked him, and he would not let her see that he had any compassion for the culprit.

The crowd poured out into the sunshine again, rich colors flashed about here and there, carts were laden and driven off with great creaks and rumblings. People were tolerably satisfied with the

ending of the affair, which left them one object for abuse in the treacherous Michault. The saleswomen congratulated themselves, only Madame Mathurine walked away alone with an angry indignant heart. It was nothing to her that her integrity had been proved, since it had once been doubted. She was not even grateful to M. Deshoulières.

Poor Max! He had done a good morning's work, perhaps warded off a serious evil; if they had been men with whom he had to deal, his good deeds would have held a chance of appreciation. Here, on the contrary, old Nannon walked off, still erect and defiant; Madame Mathurine was unthankful; Thérèse called him unmerciful. Before he had time to look for her she had wished adieu to Madame Lemaire, who wanted to keep her, and had slipped out with the crowd. M. Deshoulières, coming to where he had left her, found her gone. He was obliged to explain something of her story to Madame Lemaire, who, with all her solidity, was curious and a little romantic.

"There must be but one conclusion," she said, laughing good-humoredly when he had finished; "monsieur should marry her."

He started with undisguised amazement. "I!"

"But yes. Is it so wonderful?"

"I! What could have put that into your head?"

Madame Lemaire nodded wisely. "Perhaps it was her pretty face, perhaps it was chance. Who knows? After all it is of monsieur we are talking."

M. Deshoulières shook his head, and went away smiling, yet with a half-hidden sadness in his tone. "You must look for romances elsewhere, madame," he said. "I have no heart to spare except for my patients."

No one ever entirely realizes how much his life is moulded by what we call trifles. We do not want a lion in our path to turn us, a straw will do it as effectually. It is only an indifferent word occasionally that opens the floodgates and lets the torrent in. A look affects a life; perhaps such insignificant instruments are chosen to keep us humble. Looking back, when we have gone further on our journey, we dimly understand it, but at the time the influences seem too small to be admitted. Yet it is the teaching of all creation, whether physical or spiritual. In the drop of water, in the blade of grass, in the moment of time, in the thought of our heart, God teaches us the immensity of little things.

CHAPTER VII.

"Experience, like a pale musician, holds
A dulcimer of patience in his hands."
E. B. BROWNING.

MAX DESHOULIÈRES did not smile any more after he went away from Madame Lemaire, but he never forgot her little speech. It seemed to set all sorts of unknown strings vibrating, the words kept echoing back from his heart; things that had nothing to do with his life, as he fancied, floated up before him: children's faces like angels', the touch of tiny hands, sweet womanly voices, wistful gray eyes, all these strange uncalled-for visions haunted him; he could not have driven them away if he had wished it. If he had been an idle man, with time to spend in dreaming, he might have understood their meaning sooner; as it was, he wondered a little, and then flung himself heart and soul into a battle with some grim disease in a squalid room where there was the dirt without the picturesqueness of Charville. Almost unconsciously this man's life had been one noble self-

sacrifice. He seemed to use his great strength of will in setting aside all selfish aims. He worked with a single-mindedness out of which had grown a strange simplicity and tenderness. Thérèse, with all her hopefulness, had not his strong faith. If he had been more accustomed to make pictures, in which he formed a central figure, Madame Lemaire's words might not have stirred him as they did. A hand had swept the strings, would the tones it set vibrating grow and swell into grand, beautiful chords of sweet harmony, or die away in a sad, sorrowful wail?

That little fact of seeing Thérèse alone among all those people, vexed him with the Roulleaus. He went there the next morning. Thérèse saw him on the stairs, and fled back, foolish child, to her room, with a cold fear in her heart of what he might be come to propose. She had remarked his displeasure of the day before, and who knew what might grow out of it? Madame Roulleau used to invent little speeches of M. Deshoulières, which poor Thérèse had no reason for disbelieving; she felt them hard, — cruel. Her heart resented this trampling out of the bright things of life which they told her he was trying to force upon her. She liked sunshine, flowers, love, — liked them, and wanted them for herself with an impatience that would not so much as endure the thought of life

without them. One feels a compassion for such natures, knowing how hard the lessons of time must prove to them, and yet it may be that their very buoyancy helps them to float over the stormy waves. It was so with Thérèse at present. She felt more confident of Fabien's love now than she had done when he was near her and talking about it; she never doubted that he would return; she could turn her dingy little room in Rue St. Servan into a veritable palace with her bright thoughts of the future. There was a little precious likeness of Fabien which she would take out and talk to whenever Madame Roulleau was more than usually tyrannical. With so much sunshine before her, she could bear any thing so long as that terrible guardian would leave her alone.

Downstairs the terrible guardian was expressing his opinion to Madame Roulleau; for little Roulleau kept out of the way on these occasions, and madame preferred it, since she was always afraid that his cowardice might betray them. M. Deshoulières was very grave, very determined: he had left all these minor things to be arranged by Madame Roulleau, he said; but she must quite understand that mademoiselle must have every thing that was right and *convenable*. As he spoke he looked round, and wondered if she were happy there. His own tastes were very plain, but he was

not sure whether a young girl would not require something brighter than this barren abode; and madame, who watched him like a cat, read his looks without difficulty, and was very judicious in her answers. She did not say too much, but she implied that mademoiselle preferred the freedom and unconventionality of their family life to permitting changes to be made on her account. "She has had enough of luxury, monsieur," she said. Thérèse upstairs, shivering and trembling over that convent fancy, did not know how these two were concerned with the web and woof of her life: madame, with her covetous hands turning and twisting it to suit her purpose; Max, with his great tender heart and his quick abrupt ways, wanting to protect the little solitary figure, whose solitariness and helplessness among the crowd the day before had touched him with pity. "Poor child!" he said softly in his heart. He was not quite sure of the value of madame's professions. He made up his mind to question Thérèse herself at the first opportunity.

When he went away it was with the understanding that Thérèse should take no more solitary walks. Madame would have gladly escaped the concession, but it was not possible; and her busy thoughts went off at once to the question of how the affair could be managed, at least cost; or how

it might be balanced by extracting further work from the girl. She went up to her with a gloomy depressed face which terrified Thérèse when she opened the door.

"Is there any news? What has he said?" she asked, quickly.

"This all comes from your imprudence in loitering at the market yesterday, mademoiselle. M. Deshoulières is highly displeased, — requests that we will provide an attendant for you. An attendant!" repeated madame, with a little hoot of scorn. "When my husband toils and toils, and I pinch and pinch; and then we are reproached because you do not walk about as if you were the daughter of M. le Préfet! I saw beforehand that it would not do. You must seek another domicile, mademoiselle."

"You will send me away!" said poor Thérèse, turning pale. "But where can I go?"

Madame threw out her hands.

"That is for M. Deshoulières to decide. There is always the convent. You will be safe enough behind the *grille*," she added, with a mocking laugh.

Thérèse was very ignorant, and had no idea what unlimited powers M. Deshoulières' guardianship might not convey. The tears gathered in her eyes, she almost flung herself at madame's feet.

"No, no, no, madame," she implored, "do not send me away. I am not good enough for that life. I cannot give up Fabien. Do not send me away!"

It was her whole heart crying out, but madame looked and listened coldly.

"My children must not be sacrificed," she said, folding her hands inexorably.

There was a little silence. Madame glanced at Thérèse from under her eyelids; the girl had recovered herself, and was standing motionless, her eyes on the ground, and a red flush on her cheek. Either her pride had come to her aid, or she was making a desperate resolution. Madame thought it was time to waver.

"If, indeed —" she said, slowly. "But no."

"If what, madame?"

"You have had a grand education, without doubt, mademoiselle?"

"I used to learn a great deal. I do not know that it was any good," said Thérèse, wearily.

"I am in treaty with an admirable instructress for Octavie and Adolphe. It would be an infinite loss to them: still —"

"Do you mean that I could teach them?" said Thérèse, brightening up and looking delighted.

"It is almost wrong of me," madame declared, sighing. "I do not know what my husband will say to my weakness."

Thérèse cried out, gratefully, that she should never repent it. Her buoyant spirit reasserted itself; she drew a long breath of relief as she thought of Monsieur Deshoulières and the convent on one side, Fabien and happiness on the other, with Madame Roulleau, in her linen jacket, standing as arbitrix between them. If there had been a dozen Octavies and Adolphes she must have embraced her, as she did. Such joy did not mollify madame.

"Who is to promenade with you?" she asked, crossly. "It must not be a fine lady, to ruin us in wages."

"I have thought of some one," Thérèse cried out with eagerness. "Let it be old Nannon; she is very poor, and will be glad to get a little."

"That old creature!" exclaimed madame, who was secretly pleased, but felt it necessary to make a favor of every concession.

Perhaps Thérèse also was actuated by the spirit of contradiction towards the unconscious offender, M. Deshoulières. "I should like her better than any one else," she said.

Madame went away well satisfied with her own tactics. By a little skilful management she could make these two play against each other. Thérèse was already thoroughly prejudiced against her guardian, and should he be displeased by the choice

of Nannon, he would learn that it arose from the girl's own wilfulness. It was far more likely that, having once spoken on the subject, he would not trouble himself about it again. Madame Roulleau was a clever woman, but she knew nothing of those new sounds which were beginning to make themselves heard in his heart.

Before she left the room she told Thérèse to go to old Nannon's, and desire her to come to Rue St. Servan. M. Deshoulières was gone to Epernon, and safe out of the way. Thérèse, who all the morning had been looking longingly at the soft sunshine and the cool delicate clouds which sailed lazily across her great expanse of sky, was glad to get out into the brightness. It was one of those exquisite days of broken light in which quaint old Charville seemed full of pictures and of memories; a capricious sky, a sweet tender glow upon the stones, here and there a keen shaft of sun-ray, here and there a deep grave shadow — contrasts, but not contradictions. Later in the day there was to be a mass in the Cathedral for the children who were just confirmed; the little white-veiled figures were flitting about in all directions. Thérèse stood and watched two who came along a narrow, dark street, and under a gray archway; two black-robed sisters in great white flapping caps, stretching out on either side like wings, held

their hands. "*Soyez tranquille, mon enfant,*" one of them was saying, in her calm, hushed voice, as they passed Thérèse; it sounded almost like a benediction, as they all went quietly along under the Cathedral and the praying statues. Tears rushed into the girl's eyes; she put out her hands with a sort of vague beseeching for some such kindly words, but no one saw or understood the gesture. The figures went away into the light, Thérèse remained sadly on the broad steps looking after them. With these solemn walls rising heavenwards; with these serene, mute statues — angels and their harps, saints with folded hands, crowned kings and queens, prophets, apostles, martyrs — standing in majestic unbroken calm, it seemed as if, after all, peace might be the happiness of life. Was it to be found in such an existence as these quiet women had chosen? Would it not be better for her to yield and do as they had done? She shivered at the thought. A little white butterfly fluttered down on the hand of one of the crowned figures, and rose again, as if the touch chilled it. "It is like me," Thérèse thought bitterly; "I am not good enough for that cold, saintly life." Poor child! There were all kinds of new thoughts wrestling within her; perhaps, among them, breathed the faint distant echo of an eternal truth. Neither in the cloister nor in the world will peace

or happiness, or whatever we may call the highest earthly bliss, come to those who seek them selfishly. From behind some sad figure, in companionship where we least expect them, they may step forth smiling. But they are divine gifts; and He who gives has not made them the end of our endeavor, the goal of our race.

The girl dashed away her tears, and came slowly down from the steps; she would have gone into the Cathedral, but the doors of the north portal were not open, and she went mechanically along the streets towards Nannon's. The air was soft and healing, every thing gentle, dewy, and full of sweet beauty. Rain had fallen in the night, the broad fans of the horse-chestnut leaves still sheltered little depths out of which gleamed patches of wet, and diamond beads glistened on the grass, which feathered out here and there from a crevice in some old cracked wall. Presently Thérèse, who was not much thinking about her errand, caught the sound of a voice which recalled it. There was an old arched stone doorway lying in gray shade. Worn steps led up to it, and through the open space you could see a little sunny court, a stone fountain catching warm yellow tints, vines clambering round the edge, an old woman in a blue stuff gown and white cap leaning against it and chattering merrily. There must have been other invisible

figures to whom Nannon was holding forth, for every now and then there came a little chorus of shrill laughter. The vine-leaves rustled, their shadows danced in the sunlight; Thérèse stood at the doorway and looked at it all for a moment before she called, —

"Nannon!"

"Holy Virgin!" exclaimed the old woman, starting, "it is Mademoiselle Veuillot!"

Thérèse's name still excited interest in Charville; two or three heads peered out from the framework of the doorway.

"She looks thinner already, poor thing!" said one girl presently, in a compassionate whisper.

"No wonder, Suzette, if Madame Roulleau provides her food."

"But what becomes of all that money?"

"Who knows! Monsieur le Docteur is a good man, without doubt, but such a sum is a sore temptation when one has but to help one's self."

"That is not possible," said an old man, speaking in a thin cracked voice, and striking his stick on the ground. "The law provides that no med —"

"Bah, bah, Père André, the law may provide, but we all know that the rich snap their fingers at the law. Henri, little wicked one, be quiet. Well, Nannon, what did mademoiselle want?"

"Nannon is to be mademoiselle's *bonne!*" cried

the young girl, who had been the first to extract the information.

"Nannon! mademoiselle's *bonne!*"

The old woman laughed as heartily as the others, her brown, grotesque face wrinkling into innumerable lines. "It is true, nevertheless, my children," she said. "See what comes when least one expects it! M. Deshoulières says she is not to walk about alone; figure to yourself her choosing me! If it had been Suzette now — but no, look to yourself, Suzette; after this you will be having me for a rival with Pierre and Jacques."

The girl laughed, pouted, and twisted a wet vine-branch round little Henri's head. "Is it all settled, Mère Nannon?"

"There is Madame Roulleau to be seen."

"And she is a woman!" said old André, casting out his hands, and speaking in his poor thin voice. All the group seemed to agree in snubbing old André.

"What of that? She will not eat me," said Nannon, holding up her apron to shade her from the sun.

"That is true," assented Henri's mother. "But you will need to look out for the *sous*."

"She will hold them tight; but some must creep out of her fingers," Nannon said, nodding cheerfully; "and if M. Deshoulières drives that unfor-

tunate boy out of his place, I shall say that the saints have sent us all a recompense. That is what they do sometimes, as I will say for them, and when one does not altogether expect it at their hands. And mademoiselle asked for Jean-Marie."

Thérèse walked quickly away from the little sunshiny vine-covered court set in the framework of its grim old pointed doorway, and went back to the Cathedral, going round this time to the south portal, by which she knew she could find entrance. It lay in the full blaze of sunlight: flying buttresses, open pillars, and enormous gargoyles threw sharp shadows on the warm stone. One of the doors was open: inside lay, as it seemed, a vast chasm of darkness, but out of the midst of it the opposite transept window gleamed like a gorgeous bed of jewels. A great bell tolled solemnly; up the broad steps swept a long procession of the white-veiled children, and sisters in their serge dresses. Thérèse followed them; she found a chair, and tried not to notice the stir and bustle about her. People crowded in until the great Cathedral was almost filled. The service was held outside the choir; the little white multitude stood in the centre: on one side were other children in red dresses and rose-wreaths; all round were throngs of loving or curious spectators — warm lights flashed through the magnificent glass. Presently from

high overhead dropped the first sweet notes of the organ, and the young fresh voices swelled up to meet it.

Some of the women were crying. There was something about the service which was inexpressibly touching: the vast sombre ancient church, the childish voices. Thérèse, who had been strangely excited before, almost sobbed as she knelt. Even there her desolation and solitude seemed to wrap her round; she had not so much as any one to pray for, she thought, except Fabien. Her prayer went up, eager and piteous, that Fabien might come and she might be happy.

CHAPTER VIII.

"Behind this eminence the sun
Would drop serenely, long ere day was done;
And one who climbed that height, might see again
A second setting o'er the fertile plain
Beyond the town, and glittering in his beam,
Wind far away that poplar-skirted stream."

ARCHBISHOP TRENCH.

LOOKING back afterwards, it seemed to Thérèse as if that soft July day had been her last day of liberty; Octavie and Adolphe became terrible taskmasters. The weather changed, it grew hot, sultry, oppressive; she used to sit in the stuffy little room at Rue St. Servan and gasp for a breath of fresh air. "Adolphe, must you be all day about your theme?" she would ask, a little too impatiently perhaps; and then Octavie would hold her disagreeable little head in the air and reply, "Mamma does not like you to correct Adolphe, mademoiselle."

She was not patient at all in these days. She hated the lessons and the eternal mendings, and all the petty humiliations madame visited upon her,

enduring them only as alternatives for worse things. There must come a day of escape, she thought; but her hope was beginning to grow restless and feverish. Every morning she got up thinking something must be heard of Fabien that day, and every day the weight in her heart became heavier. She could not understand it. She was still so childish in some things that she thought the good things must come, the hard go away; I think she pictured Fabien as a kind of beautiful fairy prince, at whose appearance Madame Roulleau and Monsieur Deshoulières, and the terrible children, and the great heaps of worn-out clothes, would die away out of her life. She painted her own future in these colors until it seemed absolutely to belong to her. But, although when misgivings of its certainty obtruded themselves, she rebelled against them, I am inclined to think that misgivings came more frequently as the weeks went on.

After all, the mending was not so bad as the teaching. The clothes were a burden, but they could not contradict her or make disagreeable remarks like Octavie, or have Adolphe's fits of obstinate sulkiness. She was not patient, as I have said, but she might have pleaded a certain amount of excuse when she had but the choice of being called cross by the children or remiss by their mother. Octavie — who was dressed in the ex-

treme of fashion, and had a sallow face, high strongly-marked eyebrows, black eyes, and hair drawn up into a number of little curls at the back of her head — kept a sharp look-out for poor Thérèse's short-comings. "Mamma does not think Adolphe has improved in his writing;" "Mamma expects that you will see that our rooms are always in order, mademoiselle." When Thérèse could not smile at these speeches they hurt her terribly.

Old Nannon came to Rue St. Servan, and was duly acknowledged as the girl's attendant whenever she went out. She and Madame Roulleau had a preliminary skirmish, from which madame retired a little discomfited; for, with all her simplicity, Nannon had no lack of shrewdness. In spite of the spirit of contradiction which prompted it, Thérèse had not made a bad choice. There was a fresh vigorous heart beating in the old woman's bosom, an unconquerable fidelity, keen humor, clear wit; she liked any thing young and pretty, and felt a great compassion for this girl, who was not only young and pretty, but so friendless. Before a month was over she would have gone through fire and water to serve her. She served her better by the homely words she let drop. Every life has its pathos and its poetry, whether we acknowledge it or not; Nannon, with

her hard fare and her weather-beaten face, was like the rest. Her lover had been a soldier, had fallen out of the ranks in a long march, and died of typhus in a hut by the roadside. It was months before she heard of it — months during which she waited, and hungered, and hoped.

"And yet you lived?" asked Thérèse, looking at the brown face in wonder.

"*Si fait, si fait,*" said Nannon, laughing and showing her white teeth. "If people died of such things, mademoiselle, the world would never go on as it does. And there was my sister to take care of besides; it would have been very selfish to talk about dying."

This sister and her children seemed all the world to Nannon. It appeared to Thérèse as if the whole burden of their existence fell upon those broad old willing shoulders. Once she had asked what Mère Belot did, and Nannon quite ruffled up at the question.

"If Mademoiselle were a mother she would know that is enough," she said, reproachfully.

Thérèse could not understand her. Afterwards she found out by some chance that Mère Belot was one of those incapable women who are always taken care of, and toiled for, and shielded. There are poor queen bees as well as rich ones, and her sister brought her as much honey as she could

scrape together, and pinched, and struggled, and fought for the children, while Mère Belot sat in the street outside the house and spun a little cotton yarn between her intervals of gossip, and accepted her good things placidly. They came to her quite as a matter of course; and, though it be but a poor little hive, it makes a great difference whether you are the queen or the working bee.

Nannon had taken all the children into her faithful heart, but, perhaps, she loved Jean-Marie the best. He had been a trouble ever since he was born. He had been twice as long as the others in cutting his teeth, had frightened them all out of their wits with croup and small-pox and fevers, had broken his leg, and set the house on fire, and was for ever being dragged out of scrapes by Nannon. So many things happened to him that I believe she looked upon him as a hero at last. He was always making fresh starts on the road to fortune, and trailing back again before a week was over. This last start at Gohon's farm had carried him quite a long way. He had been there more than a month: Nannon's pride was excessive; she used to walk out through the waving cornfields, and watch the farm for an hour for the happiness of seeing Jean-Marie bring out the horses or fetch the cows. It was an innocent little triumph very dear to her; and, perhaps, it was no

wonder that she felt it hard when M. Deshoulières brought to light that misdemeanor with the Cottereaus and Michault, which threatened to put an end to all her triumphs. She did not know that it was M. Deshoulières also who had gone out to the farm the next day, and asked that the boy might have a longer trial; she accused the doctor of having almost deprived Jean-Marie of his situation; and Thérèse had all her baseless prejudices against him confirmed by the old woman. It was very unfortunate, because she might have escaped from the Roulleau tyranny if Nannon had counselled her to appeal to M. Deshoulières; but since his decision against her boy, there was no harshness of which Nannon did not believe him guilty.

So these two used to sit and talk on the hot, dry evenings, when Thérèse could get away from her labor in the stifling little house. Nannon and she would wander through the quaint old town, down the steep streets, and so to the quiet river, whose murmur fell on her ears like the sound of a comforting voice before she reached it.

She liked those evenings best when the sky was tender primrose color, and the dusky trees stood up against it in soft, shady, mysterious masses, with strangely bright bars of color gleaming through them. There were disused fortifications, an old gateway, and a bridge; above these houses

jumbled oddly together clambering up the side of the hill. She liked to watch the water slip calmly by, the leaves floating on its surface, the long grasses under the bank breaking it into little brown eddies. There were quiet shadows, shadows always comprehensible, never terrible; shadows which stole gently down to the roots of the willows, by which the river rolled along, catching their reflection on its surface, and then suddenly lit up with a sheet of tremulous golden light. A little rough causeway ran by the waterside, here and there a stunted sapling thrust itself out as though to kiss the stream that moved on regardless; here and there were little wooden standing-places — *lavatoires* — for the washerwomen, who all day long thumped and gesticulated and chattered shrilly, but in the evening left the river to its own unceasing songs.

It was a very quiet, out-of-the-way little corner. The cornfields stretched far away — great flat plains; a bird might cry in the distance, the church bells clang, a peasant in his blouse go by and wish them good evening; except these signs of life there was very little to disturb them. Nannon thought it *triste;* but it seemed to bring refreshment to Thérêse, who never before had liked silence and solitude. She was ill at this time, I think; feverish, restless, and sick with hope de-

ferred. She had been waiting for two years, at her age a lifetime. Separation had not before been so cruel as it was now that the great bar between her and Fabien was gone, and only his presence was needed. Perhaps her hopefulness would have sunk altogether under the strain if it had not been for the river and Nannon.

Sitting on a stone by its bank one evening, as I have described their doing, they were startled by seeing a figure coming along the narrow causeway towards them. The sun had set behind the upper town; they were too much under the hill to see the houses or the Cathedral spires, but the rich autumnal sunset lingered in the sky, crimson patches and dark purples on a background of tawny gold; there was a soft, breezy rustle in the air. The figure came out of dusky shadows along the causeway, and it startled Thérèse, because she saw at once it was not one of the blue-shirted laborers, who, at rare intervals, came back into the town by that path. When it drew nearer she recognized M. Deshoulières. He had been detained at a village, which lay not far from Charville, where a little child had been ill. That afternoon it had died, and M. Deshoulières, who loved little children, was coming home touched and softened. He had chosen this path, perhaps, because, although he did not think about it in his

heart, the river and the long grasses, and the tremulous golden light, had their attractions also for him. He was looking at the water, and when he suddenly came upon these two figures sitting quietly there in the midst of the solitude, he could not refrain from an exclamation of surprise.

"Mademoiselle Veuillot!" he said.

Thérèse did not know what to answer. Neither of them had expected to meet the other here. She was half angry, half frightened, lest this innocent little enjoyment of hers should also be pronounced unfitting. Both she and Nannon had risen, Nannon standing with her arms crossed defiantly.

"We came here because it is so cool and so pleasant," said Thérèse, looking beseechingly at her enemy. Surely the river might be spared to her! "Is it late?" she said, suddenly conscious of the depth of the shadows.

"A little," he answered dryly. In his heart he was wondering with a little amusement at her fancy for solitude, and at the companionship in which he found her. It seemed to him as if the silence and the shadows were more fitting for a grave man like himself than for such a child as Thérèse. In the waning light, in her black dress, she looked thin and pale. "This is not a place for you to sit in so late. There is mist from the

river," he said. "You should keep on the higher ground."

"We do not often stay so late, do we, Nannon?" said Thérèse, appealingly; "and it is so hot in the town."

Nannon, who represented the opposition to M. Deshoulières, was nothing loath to enter upon the field. "There is no harm in the river," she said, with decision. "Monsieur would know that if he had lived in the town as long as I have. If mademoiselle prefers the band and a little distraction, she can always find it above there; but if she likes better to come and sit in this seclusion, there is nothing to prevent it. White mist does no one any hurt. It is the stirring up which brings the fever," added Nannon, with a spiteful allusion to some sanitary measures of M. Deshoulières.

"You are coming back now?" he said, addressing himself to Thérèse, without taking any notice of Nannon's speech.

Long afterwards she wondered at the clearness with which she remembered every detail of that walk, the little rough, untidy path, the rose-bushes growing out of the gray wall, the dog that stood and barked, then the houses and the steep hot streets. At the time she scarcely noticed them, but afterwards they came back. M. Deshoulières

was grave and preoccupied; but once, when Nannon had lingered behind to speak to some friend, he turned round and said, with a sudden smile and a twinkle in his blue eyes, —

"So that is the companion you have chosen, mademoiselle?"

Thérèse murmured something, feeling horribly guilty: she wondered whether he would guess that her sympathy with Nannon began in the market.

"She is not a bad old woman," went on the unconscious Max. "She lets herself be eaten up by that sister of hers, and she does not always tell the truth; but she will be honest and faithful."

"I am sure she is faithful," said Thérèse, forcing herself to say something, and thinking of Fabien.

M. Deshoulières looked up quickly. "Is faithfulness a favorite virtue of yours, mademoiselle?"

"It seems to me that it is the anchor of life," answered the girl in a low voice.

He looked at her again with a little wonder. There was something almost passionate in the tone with which she spoke those few words. His next question came out abruptly.

"Does your present residence suit you? Are you sure that you would not prefer a change?"

Thérèse thought of the convent, and turned sick. "I do not wish for any change," she said, hurriedly.

"You are content to remain where you are?"

It was a strange sort of contentment, Thérèse thought, with a quick flash of self-pity; but the other place of refuge that was open to her would be unbearable. She said yes to his question, and then despised herself for the falseness of her answer. "Every place must be a little sad to me, just now, monsieur," she went on, "for I belong to no one. But I am glad to stay at Mme. Roulleau's."

He did not answer. She thought, perhaps, he had not listened to her pathetic little explanation; she did not know that it had gone straight to his heart. The pity that he had felt once or twice before became more intense, more personal. Perhaps the time and circumstances helped the feeling: the evening was soft, quiet, almost solemn; all his sympathies had been called out that day by the little child's deathbed. "Let me go to sleep," the little tired voice had said; there was no more pain afterwards, except in the hearts of the watchers. The words came back to him continually, with a vision of the tiny, wasted, flushed face; any appeal would have touched him in his present mood, and Thérèse seemed only an older child, with no one, as she said, to care for her. He walked on, thinking silently, and she made a great effort to put a question into words.

"Have you heard nothing yet of Monsieur Saint-Martin?"

"Nothing, nothing. One would have supposed that by this time a letter — a message, at least — might have reached Ardron. It would seem that the estrangement was serious. Why do people take so much trouble to forge their own unhappiness, Mademoiselle Veuillot?"

There are many ways of doing that work, innocent, unconscious ways, sometimes. At this very moment, M. Deshoulières, with his big, manly, pitiful heart, was laying it open and making it ready for the sharp red-hot thrusts that came afterwards. We do the same, all of us, often. We grind the weapons that are to wound us. But, thank God, the weapons are not always evil, and such leave no poison in the wound.

"Mademoiselle, did you hear the clock strike?" said Nannon, bustling up. "We must make haste, the days grow so short, and the virgins up there do not carry their lamps lit."

"Up there" was the cathedral porch, where the parable is graven, and the ten stand in their changeless attitudes of despair or bliss. M. Deshoulières, Thérèse, and Nannon passed under them. It was not so dark as Nannon represented, but a sweet duskiness was veiling all the bright tints; people sat outside their houses laughing and chattering

with their children; a few lights began to appear; in the distance was heard the indistinct roll of a drum. Rue St. Servan looked gloomy when they turned into it: the light always left it early. When M. Deshoulières wished Thérèse good evening, he said, with a smile which she did not see, —

"Do not stay so long by the river another evening, mademoiselle."

CHAPTER IX.

"A stirring of the heart, a quickening keen
Of sight and hearing to the delicate
Beauty and music of an altered world;
. . . . That mysterious light,
Which doth reveal and yet transform; which give
Destiny, sorrow, youth, and death, and life,
Intenser meaning; in disquieting
Lifts up; a shining light: men call it love."

JEAN INGELOW.

M. DESHOULIÈRES went slowly away from the Roulleaus towards his own house. The *café* at the corner of the little Place was brilliantly lit; outside, between great tubs of evergreens and climbing daturas, men were sitting, smoking, drinking coffee, or mixing horrible little decoctions of absinthe. Instead of joining the group, and reading his evening budget of the *Patrie*, the *Gaulois*, or the *Organe du Département*, M. Deshoulières strolled away to one of the deserted seats under the trees, where there was not sufficient cheerful light or sound for the attraction of idlers, and he was not likely to be recognized. There was his own house opposite, dark and

dreary-looking. Some of the windows round were open, light streamed out, figures sat in the balconies; one woman he noticed particularly in a white shining dress, with a child clambering on her knee; he could hear happy voices, laughter and singing. His own house looked like a dark patch in the middle of it all: presently, one little feeble light passed a window, disappeared, shone out again in the story above. "Veuve Angelin is going upstairs," commented M. Deshoulières. For the first time a feeling of dissatisfaction took shape in his mind. Why had he no one better than Veuve Angelin to welcome him? Why should his house be unlike those others? It had a balcony, — he had hardly noticed it before, — why might not a lady, in a white shining dress, sit there in a little glow of warm light? He half closed his eyes, and fancied her: a slight figure, dark brown hair, lying lightly on her forehead; gray eyes, with the beseeching look he had more than once remarked. "Every place must be a little sad to me, for I belong to no one." His shining lady would say no such pathetic words. Ah, M. Deshoulières, you opened your heart to Pity, and another visitant slipped in unawares!

It seemed but a little while to himself that he sat there under the trees, yet, when at last he roused himself to move, half the lights had vanished, only

two or three excited politicians remained before the *café :* there was a September chill in the air in spite of the day's heat. Max was thoroughly ashamed, on glancing round, to realize the time he had wasted. It was too late to light another cigar ; he got up, shook himself, and walked across to his house. A little primitive light — just a wick in a glass of oil — burnt feebly within the entrance ; at the head of the stairs stood Veuve Angelin, in an injured frame of mind.

"So monsieur has come at last," she said sharply, "and all the world has been seeking him for the last two hours. There has been a message from the Evêché : they are all in commotion : Monseigneur may be dead by this time, or recovered, which would be almost as bad, considering that that miserable little Monsieur Pinot would have the credit of it."

"What was the message ?" asked M. Deshoulières, calmly.

"Monseigneur felt himself more feeble this evening, and desired monsieur to come without delay. If they found you absent, M. Jean was to fetch M. Pinot at once. I got him to talk about that affair at Minguard, which kept him a little ; but it is too horrible to think of that other creature's triumph. If monsieur were to walk very fast ?"

"There is no occasion for such an exertion,

Marie, since M. Pinot is there. Monseigneur is quite safe with him."

"Monsieur will not go?"

"Oh, yes, I shall go. Only I should like my coffee first. And, stay, have there been no other messages?"

"Only one from that old André. The boy is worse — or so they said."

"Why did you not say so?" demanded M. Deshoulières, sternly. "Give me my coat at once."

"But, monsieur, the coffee —"

"Give me my coat."

"Monseigneur —"

But the doctor was clattering down the stairs.

"What a man!" muttered Veuve Angelin, throwing up her hands. "He is no more fit to manage his affairs than a child — an idiot! I do what I can, but he overthrows every thing. Monseigneur sending for him, that wretched little Pinot longing to jump into his shoes, and in the face of it all he first orders coffee, and then rushes off to that old misery André, from whom he will never get a *sou*. It upsets my nerves to think of it. Monseigneur at the Evêché, and that boy of old André's in a hole of a place, both wanting him, and he must choose to go to the boy! And M. Jean was so agreeable! It is true, as he says, that I have a great deal of solitude to endure here, but

one could bear a great deal if those one lived with were only reasonable. And there will be that cook of M. Pinot's giving herself airs at the market to-morrow! I will take care to let them know whom M. Jean came to first — but monsieur never arrives at taking his position, do what I will."

It was midnight before M. Deshoulières reached the Evêché; the Bishop's nephew received him freezingly.

"It is some hours since we sent to request your services, monsieur."

"When I reached my house, Monsieur l'Abbé, I understood that your servant had wisely gone on to M. Pinot, and knowing Monseigneur to be in good hands I obeyed a pressing summons to a poor boy whose state gives me great uneasiness."

M. l'Abbé stared. Here was the chief pastor of the flock lying upstairs, sick and weary, and this doctor occupying himself with attendance upon one of the very poorest of the sheep. He answered stiffly: —

"M. Pinot is at this moment with the Bishop."

The doctor bowed.

"He appears to understand the case, and I do not think we need deprive your other patients of your time."

"Under those circumstances, as I am very sleepy, M. l'Abbé," said M. Deshoulières cheer-

fully, "I shall go and indulge myself with great satisfaction. With Monseigneur's symptoms, you may have perfect confidence in Monsieur Pinot."

He left the Abbé speechless, ran down the broad oaken stairs, and through a yard and a garden out into the Place Notre Dame. It was a calm, beautiful night, overhead the stars were shining, before him rose the Cathedral in silent, grave repose. "This night's work will be the making of Pinot," he thought to himself, as he walked under the dark houses. "All Charville will know of it to-morrow. He is a painstaking little man, without originality of conception, but able to benefit by what he sees practised, which is more than one can say of all one's trade. I am glad he should have this lift, though I shall miss the old Bishop's good-natured face."

The next morning, when M. Deshoulières went out early, Veuve Angelin devoutly hoped he was going to the Evêché. At his *déjeûner*, however, she waited upon him with so lugubrious a face, that he felt himself obliged to inquire into the cause.

"It cannot be true. Monsieur would not look so unconcerned. Otherwise it is reported that monsieur was refused permission to see Monseigneur last evening."

"It is quite true, Marie. A terrible fact."

"And that creature, Victoire, was boasting through the market that her master was in attendance all night."

"I am sorry to hear that Monseigneur required it."

"But, monsieur —"

"Well?"

"You are ruined!"

"I? Not at all."

"Monsieur Pinot at the Evêché!"

"We will get him an introduction to the Préfecture."

"Monsieur should not jest. I shall never be able to hold up my head at the market again."

"That is a very lamentable consequence. At all events, Marie, you will have the comfort of reflecting that a Bishop is at the bottom of your misfortunes."

M. Deshoulières sat smiling and unimpressed; Veuve Angelin was almost crying over the mortifications she foresaw to be in store for her, when a step sounded on the stairs. She went out and came running in again, radiant.

"From the Evêché," she said, giving him a note.

M. Deshoulières, who was human, could not himself resist a little twinkle of satisfaction as he read. The Abbé, after making his compliments to

M. Deshoulières, begged him to call at the Evêché as soon as his other engagements would admit. The note was pointedly civil.

"Poor man!" thought the doctor, folding it up with a smile. "Such a concession ought to serve for penance."

"Monsieur is sent for?" asked Veuve Angelin, eagerly.

"I am going to assist M. Pinot," answered the doctor, gravely. "Don't you know, Marie, that a great man has generally a second in command? After this, if Madame Victoire usurps the honors of the market, you may decidedly claim the privilege of following close behind."

Veuve Angelin, who could not understand a joke, was left not altogether at ease. "If monsieur loses his standing in the place, I shall quit," she said to herself. "To have that woman setting herself before us would be unbearable. To assist M. Pinot! The Bishop would have more proper feeling than to allow such a thing to be named. M. Pinot!"

M. Deshoulières meanwhile reached the iron gates, passed under the trees, from which brown leaves were dropping, and rang the bell of the Evêché. M. Jean himself opened the door, the Abbé was not to be seen. The doctor went upstairs into a large lofty apartment, wainscoted with

dark wood. Logs were burning in an open fireplace; in a great cushioned chair drawn close to it, sat an old kindly-faced man, with a little black skull-cap covering his white locks, and his withered hands stretched out on the arms of his chair.

"So you are come this time, Monsieur Deshoulières," he said, with a little nod of welcome.

"Monseigneur," said the doctor, respectfully, "it was no intentional neglect on my part. I consider it my duty to attend first to the most pressing cases, and I was well aware that Monsieur Pinot would prove efficient."

"Oh, I know all about it. It was my nephew. Monsieur l'Abbé does not infrequently make a — hem — he makes mistakes," said the Bishop, pulling himself up. "And now, my good M. Deshoulières, before we say any thing more, be kind enough to tell me how is the boy, and what is his name?"

"He is a little better," said the doctor, smiling, "and he is the grandson of old André Triquet, the wood-cutter."

"What does he most want?"

"Every thing."

"Except a good doctor," said Monseigneur, with a kind smile. "There he has the advantage of us all. Well, I must see to my rival's comforts. And now for my next question. I do not receive

much definite information: is it your opinion that the town is in a healthy condition?"

M. Deshoulières shook his head. "There have been fever cases clinging to it all the summer."

"But they say that the cold weather will cure them."

"The cold weather may undoubtedly check the results, but if the cause remains, I venture, Monseigneur, to predict a fierce epidemic for next year."

"And the cause is —?"

"The blindness or the wickedness of our authorities."

"You speak strongly, Monsieur Deshoulières."

"You would do the same, Monseigneur, if your work lay where mine does."

There was a little silence: the doctor became aware of the unintentional irony of his words; the Bishop also had recognized it, for he moved his head restlessly upon the cushion. Presently he stretched out his hand to the doctor and said with simple dignity, —

"I am an old man. I cannot give the personal help this great town requires at my hands. Strength and opportunity are no longer mine, but at least I can pronounce the blessing of God upon those who, like you, are using them for His poor."

There was something of grandeur in his face

and attitude; M. Deshoulières, much moved, rose up and stood silent. He had never before realized in the Bishop's character the force which lay hidden behind an easy good-nature. At this moment a bell rang.

"That is Monsieur Pinot," said the Bishop, relapsing into a smile. "I shall not see him."

"Monseigneur, all this time we have not spoken of yourself."

"I did not send to you for that purpose. I believe your friend is doing me no harm, and it would give him so much satisfaction to cure me that I must let him have the chance for once. But if he fails, I bargain that André Triquet's grandson and I change doctors."

"Nevertheless, I shall put a few questions," said M. Deshoulières.

When these were over, the Bishop, who liked a little gossip, detained him.

"Is your strange trusteeship still going on?"

"As it was."

"And you have received no tidings of the young man? It is peculiar, very peculiar. There was a girl, also, left under your charge, was there not?"

Max flushed slightly. The last night's thoughts, which occupation had hunted out of his mind, came back like a torrent. He caught a glimpse of himself in a great velvet-bordered mirror which stood

over the chimney-piece, he looked old, grave, unlike a lover for Thérèse.

"Mademoiselle Veuillot has found a temporary home, Monseigneur, at the house of Ignace Roulleau, the notary in Rue St. Servan. The conditions of her small legacy require her to remain in Charville."

"She might be received at our convent," suggested the Bishop gravely.

M. Deshoulières made no answer beyond taking leave.

CHAPTER X.

"Have I not nursed, for two long wretched years,
That miserable hope, that every day
Grew weaker, like a baby sick to death,
Yet dearer for its weakness, day by day!"

MADOC.

AFTER that evening walk from the river Thérèse told Nannon she thought that M. Deshoulières was kinder than she had fancied. Nannon, whose prejudices were invincible, shook her head.

"He may be kind when he pleases, I do not deny it, but he is as hard as a stone."

"Every one is hard, I think," said Thérèse, sadly.

Her bright hopefulness was leaving her; there was so much irritation and fret in her daily life, so much contact with low, mean natures, that it had not power to hold its own. That future to which she looked forward was not one which strengthened her to bear the present; it rather added to the fever of impatience which consumed her. We want something stronger than props of our own rearing when the dark days come with their storms.

Poor child, it appeared to herself as if she was for ever stretching out her hands and groping vainly in the darkness for something by which to hold. There was one figure among those which for ages had stood outside the great Cathedral and called to the passers-by, that she had grown almost to identify with herself — a woman who seemed half in supplication, half in fear. It is probable that no one else had seen that expression in the attitude. Those beautiful grave statues at Charville are able to adapt themselves, with something of the power of the Psalms, to the wants and wishes of those who love them. All around are the great flat corn plains; every thing is made to speak of crops and gains, getting and selling, buying of farms, proving of oxen. But in the midst there rises, like an eternal protest, this glorious Cathedral, with spires always pointing heavenwards, always typifying what man's life may be amid all the world's care and turmoil. Life in the world, not of it. Thérèse, who did not recognize this, who perhaps had not lived long enough to search for types and shadows in the things about her, was yet conscious of an increasing delight in wandering round the old Cathedral. She fancied she was losing her props when, after all, she was being trained to hold by those that would never fail her.

Madame Roulleau, in spite of her cleverness, almost endangered her prospects by her treatment of Thérèse just now. Even her covetousness was not so strong as her love of oppression, and her pleasure in humiliating the girl by all possible means. Thérèse was made almost a drudge in the household. Pride prevented her from complaining, but she felt fierce and bitter against her oppressors. She might have appealed to M. Deshoulières, of whom she stood less in awe than before their last conversation, had she seen him, but for a month or two they did not meet. He came two or three times to Rue St. Servan, but Mme. Roulleau held there might be dangers in interviews, and contrived that he should never see Thérèse. As it happened, also, they never encountered one another elsewhere. Every one knows how in a large place you may be months without once crossing the track of your nearest neighbor, and so it was with Thérèse and M. Deshoulières. Had he been resolute, of course he could have effected it without difficulty, but, in truth, he was not decided what to do. Deep in his heart that little vision of Thérèse in his home, loved and cared for, had never stirred from its place. If during the day, with its ceaseless toil and battling, there was a veil drawn across the sweet, homely picture, he suffered his thoughts to

dwell upon it with an ever-deepening tenderness when the quiet hours came. What held him back was the dread lest he might take an unfair advantage of the girl's present loneliness. He knew nothing of all that made it most bitter, of the weariness of her waiting, of the physical hardship of her lot, but he knew from her own words that a sense of her desolation was strong upon her, and he feared lest it might lead her to accept another lot, afterwards to prove more unendurable. He thought hardly of himself, he was so much older, so grave, so occupied, that he dreaded hurrying her into a mistake. He longed to see her, but with the determination which he exercised over longings, he accepted the separation, believing that each day she might become more reconciled to her position, or better acquainted with the depths of her own feelings.

It was a noble, unselfish heart in which the unconscious Thérèse was set as in a little shrine.

Does it make life sadder or brighter to think how much of this unknown treasuring there is in the world around us? People who fancy themselves least cared for sometimes have a wealth of affection poured out upon them, of which they may never dream until the day when every thing is made plain. One does not know whether it is comforting or saddening to recollect this, — com-

forting, one hopes, because it is very sure that such love cannot be wasted, whether it seems so in our eyes or not.

November came. It was not foggy, but there was a good deal of rain, and the air was damp and chilly. The vines that had been so fresh and blithe through the summer now disconsolately waved their straggling helpless branches to and fro from the little balconies. The great plains, in which lay hid the promise of next year's abundance, looked brown and dreary without their wealth of golden corn. Thérèse used to escape to her own room when the teaching was over, and shiver there rather than sit with Madame Roulleau in the little ugly room with its great stove filling up one corner. Her walks with Nannon were necessarily fewer and interrupted, owing to the shortening days and the rain, and she suffered for want of them. She grew pale and thin, her step lost its elasticity, her mouth its smile. Was she never to escape from this life, this weary, hateful treadmill? When depression seizes on one point it assails us on all; those cruel words of Fabien's became much more terrible to her than ever they had seemed before. She was among those he had renounced; what was her love that it should hold him through those years, across unknown distances? And then she would determine that he was dead.

One day — while it was quite early, and Thérèse was working away at the children, with a dreary sense of drudgery, which did them and herself no good — Mme. Roulleau, who had gone to her bedroom to hunt for something in a great press, was startled by her husband coming in upon her with a white scared face.

"Zénobie — Zénobie, *mon amie!*" he said piteously.

"Well? What now?"

"That which we dreaded is arriving — Monsieur Saint-Martin! What will become of us?"

"Is Monsieur Saint-Martin here?" inquired madame with perfect coolness, although she turned a shade paler.

"Here! The saints forbid!"

"The saints are not likely to be on your side, so that I would not place much confidence in their protection, if I were you," said his wife, sarcastically. "Have the goodness, Ignace, to inform me what this great event may be that you find so disturbing."

"*Mon amie*, do not be angry. I have come to you at once. But it is ruin. Monsieur Deshoulières has just been here; he has received a letter—"

"Well?"

"A letter about our affair."

"Give it to me."

"How did she know I had it?" murmured the little man, half in admiration, half in fear, as he took it from his pocket. Madame received it in silence. The note consisted only of a few lines: — "If Monsieur Deshoulières desires tidings of Monsieur Fabien Saint-Martin, nephew of Monsieur Moreau, recently deceased, let him find himself at the Lion d'Or, at Pont-huine, on the afternoon of the 20th of November, at three o'clock." No more. The post-mark was Paris.

"The twentieth! That is to-day," remarked madame meditatively. The paleness had increased a little; her lips were set more tightly.

"One hundred and eighty francs a month," groaned Roulleau.

"And M. Deshoulières is gone?"

"Gone? No. He has just received a message from the Préfet. Madame is taken in sharp illness. He came here fretting and fuming on his way to the Préfecture, as if this horrible Monsieur Saint-Martin were the one person he most desired to see upon the earth. Did you not understand, Zénobie? It is I who must go."

"You! I understand! How can I understand?" screamed madame, facing round upon him in a flame of indignation — "when you come crying out that you are ruined, all the time having the game placed in your very hands! You have grown

so crooked, you cannot even speak straight to your own wife. Can you not think even so much as this for yourself! Are you blind — a dolt — a baby — an imbecile!"

"Zénobie!" implored the little man in an agony.

"Yes!" she said, with a world of scorn in her tone; "that is your *métier*, and all you are fit for — to take care lest any one should overhear us. I cannot keep patience always. All the world may know that Monsieur Saint-Martin is coming, if they will."

"Zénobie!"

"I repeat it. At what time do you go?"

"The train leaves in half an hour."

"Then do not interrupt me."

She turned away from him, and sat down. M. Roulleau, too glad to gain peace, waited patiently. For five minutes there was silence, broken by no sound but the heavy drip of rain; a distant rumble of carts; one or two church clocks striking the hour. Then madame lifted her head, and spoke in a measured, set voice, very different from her late vehement outbreak, —

"You will go to the station, and take a ticket for Pont-huiné," she said; "but you will get out at Maury, the village on this side of it. Make what inquiries you can about strangers at the Lion

d'Or, and return by the last train. It is probable that M. Deshoulières will meet you at the station."

"What then?" said the little man breathlessly.

"You have seen nothing, heard nothing, done nothing. No one has appeared at the Lion d'Or. If you may venture an opinion, the whole affair is a silly hoax. Are you capable of this?"

"Every day implicates us more," Roulleau said, wiping his face.

"There is no gain without speculation," replied madame, with one of her scornful glances. "Would you prefer opening your arms to Monsieur Saint-Martin?"

"He will ask so many questions."

"It is the more easy in such a case to shape your answers."

Little Roulleau was helpless under her inexorable will. His own sordid nature prompted him one way, while his cowardice held him back. He would have been a villain without his wife, but he would have dug underground, putting out all his little crafty resources, to fence himself round from discovery. She worked more boldly and for larger ventures. The imprudences she committed kept him in continual alarm. At the same time there was a fertility of resource, a vigor in her undertakings, of which he acknowledged the value, and which were strong enough to carry him along

against his judgment. He remonstrated, but he had never sufficient power to resist. She swept away all his little terrified suggestions like a whirlwind. Ignace put on his yellow straw hat, took his thread gloves and his umbrella, and went obediently to the station. Madame was more polite that day to Thérèse than she had been for months.

In the evening, Thérèse was sitting with the children, who were supposed to be preparing their lessons for the next day. Octavie, always upright and suggestive, was at the table, with a book open before her, on the alert, as usual, to snub Mademoiselle Veuillot or her brother, as the case might require. He was a very ugly little boy, with his baggy knickerbockers and cut-away jacket, and a closely cropped little head; but he was not so utterly detestable in Thérèse's eyes as Octavie. With all his obstinacy and provoking ways he was not a worldly, unnatural little being like her. He had not her patronizing, superior ways; he was not always watching and spying. I am telling you what Thérèse thought, and it must be remembered that she was not in a patient mood at this time: she was eating the bread of poverty, and it was made very bitter. This evening Adolphe would not attend. He jumped up and down, upset his chair, danced about the room. "Mamma thinks

that Adolphe already knows less of history than when he began it with you, mademoiselle," remarked Octavie, pleasantly.

"I know more than you!" shouted Adolphe, indignant at this report, and still careering round the table. "I know more than you, and more than mademoiselle, and more than a great many people."

Octavie lifted her arched eyebrows.

"But yes, I do, and I could tell you about it, only I don't choose."

"Adolphe!" said Thérèse, sharply, "I am waiting."

"She always thinks that mamma tells her every thing," said Adolphe triumphantly, "but she does not. She is only a little girl, is she, mademoiselle? I know a great deal more."

"Madame Barry never permitted Adolphe to misbehave himself, mademoiselle. It is only since you have been our governess," said Octavie, furiously.

"She will not be our governess long," cried Adolphe, before Thérèse could speak, "if M. Saint-Martin is come."

"Monsieur Saint-Martin!"

All the room turned round before Thérèse; she caught at the table to steady herself. When she opened her eyes, the children were staring at her,

Octavie's sharp black eyes looking curiously, Adolphe a little frightened. Thérèse cried out in a glad tone they had never heard before from her, —

"Is Monsieur Saint-Martin come, Adolphe?"

Nobody answered. Octavie had nudged her brother, and he began to be afraid that he might be punished for repeating words he had caught in his mother's high-pitched voice as he passed the bedroom door. "All the world may know that Monsieur Saint-Martin is coming," she had said; but Adolphe remembered one or two sharp calamities which had befallen him for repeating his mother's sayings when she was "in a tempest." He would not speak.

"Adolphe, dear Adolphe, is he really come?" said Thérèse. Her eyes looked like stars; she put out her hands imploringly; she wanted to hear it again, but she believed it at once; she was so young that happiness seemed the most natural thing in the world. Of course he was come; her troubles were at an end; her heart felt as if it was dancing for joy. He was come; every thing was changed, forgotten; her youthfulness leaped up again; she looked kindly even on Octavie. "Where is he, dear children, is he here?"

Adolphe shook his head emphatically; he did not know what to say. Octavie, who believed

that a great blunder had been committed, said, patronizingly, —

"You should not listen to him, mademoiselle: he does not understand."

"Mamma said it," cried Adolphe stoutly, determined to assert himself. But Thérèse was already flying down the stairs into the little *salon*. "Perhaps he is there," she thought. Monsieur and madame, who were standing together in the middle of the room, turned hastily round as Thérèse came quickly in. It might have been the light, which was not burning very brightly or clearly, that made their faces look yellow and haggard, the notary's especially. Perhaps they, too, believed they might have seen M. Saint-Martin, when the door opened so abruptly, and Thérèse, flushed, smiling, radiant, stood before them.

"Is he here?" she asked joyfully, though a momentary glance showed her that no one was in the room but monsieur and madame, who were speechless at a question which seemed to echo back their fears. Madame recovered herself instantly.

"To whom do you allude, mademoiselle?" she inquired with a politeness, to which Thérèse was a stranger.

The girl patted the ground impatiently. "To my cousin — to M. Saint-Martin. Adolphe tells me that he is come."

"That boy romances — he is a droll," said madame, holding up her hands and turning to her husband, with a little show of parental interest. "He means no harm; but he must not be allowed to make announcements so unfounded without correction. I shall — "

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Thérèse, with a sharp cry of disappointment.

"My poor mademoiselle," said madame, taking hold of her hand, "you must not be angry with him, he is but a child; he has the heart of an angel, but he talks like a boy without knowing what he is about. Do you not suppose that I should have flown to tell you, had only Monsieur Saint-Martin — whom we so desire — arrived?"

"And it is not so? Oh, madame, are you sure?"

All the radiancy had gone; her eyes filled with tears. Madame, who was not yet sure what a day might bring forth, made her sit down, even kept her hand. Thérèse let her hold it, she was too stunned to be altogether conscious; a dull weight of disappointment had fallen upon her, from which she could not at once rally.

"I will tell you, my child. Ignace, some one is waiting to see you," said madame, significantly; for the little man was still standing under the yellow light, looking from Thérèse to the door, as

if another person might yet enter. "Now he is gone, and I will tell you all about it. There has been a letter from some foolish person — my husband would assure you that such idle jesters are never wanting — to hint that there was news to be heard of M. Saint-Martin. Poor Ignace! He has a good heart; he started off at once. 'One should neglect nothing,' he said to me, and he went away, deserting his business, and spending the day in leaving not a stone unturned. He has come back so weary! I must go and give him his soup."

"And he heard nothing?" asked Thérèse, faintly.

"Absolutely nothing. I guessed how it would be, but I would not discourage him. You should not have had this disappointment, *chère* mademoiselle, but who could have expected that little droll to have put two and two together so cleverly?" said madame, smiling. "You find him almost too quick, do you not? and he has not Octavie's admirable discretion. He is impetuous, like me."

Thérèse started up from her seat. "I will go to my room, since it is all a delusion," she said, in a harsh, changed voice.

"You must not think too much of this Monsieur Saint-Martin," said madame, with a little assumption of motherliness. "Men come and go, like the clouds; one can put no dependence upon them.

And you shall not lose your home, let Monsieur Deshoulières say what he will. *Allons*, I have a heart!"

The girl made no answer. She stood motionless until madame had finished, then turned away, walked heavily out of the apartment, up the stairs, and into her own little room. There, with a low, bitter cry, which would no longer be repressed, she flung herself down by her bed. The cry, which at first was inarticulate, shaped itself into words: "Fabien, Fabien, I can bear this life no longer! Oh, why, why do you not come? It is so hard. Why have I all this to endure?"

CHAPTER XI.

"Like sun above, a woman's love
Must have its destined way;
To some great gain, to others pain,
And wherefore who can say?
But be it bliss or wretchedness,
In reason man must own
That it is true, and nothing new,
She loves for love alone."

POOR Thérèse's hope seemed to desert her terribly after that disappointment. Madame, who, for a few days, was polite and kind in a spasmodic sort of fashion, fell back into her old ways, when nothing more was heard of the appointment at the Lion d'Or. Thérèse used to feel strange alternations of listlessness and indignation creeping over her. At times it was as if a life was closing round her against which it was hopeless to rebel,—a life which was relentless and overpowering; at times her heart cried out passionately against her oppressors. She accepted whatever was put upon her with a dull kind of aching, but without a protest. She was young and healthy, so that although

her cheek lost its roundness, her strength did not absolutely give way; but the grief she suffered was too much mixed with bitterness, and too repressed from outward signs, not to be hurtful even physically. It seemed to her as if all the world were against her — M. Deshoulières, Monsieur and Madame Roulleau; even Fabien, in his far-away home, had renounced her. Yet she never ceased to love him. Only hope was shaken, because faith had never been strong in poor Thérèse. Her childhood had been loveless; the child had little teaching, — teaching, that is, which should make her strive after high things, or shape her little life after a holier pattern than those she saw around her. She believed her aunt Ferdinande to have been a good woman, but it was a goodness so weak and despairing that the girl despised it. It seemed to her as if this world she lived in was one where might, however unjust, carried the day. Where trust should have been there was a void in her heart, from which sprang no comfort, only bitterness and rebellion.

This year the winter at Charville set in with strange fits and starts. The owners of thermometers took a proud delight in electrifying their neighbors by reports of sudden rises and falls in their favorite study. There came sharp frosts, even snow. The river flowed like an inky stream

between white banks; icicles froze round the stone fountain; there was what old Nannon called a *jolie gelée* — a certain keen, bitter beauty in the harmonies of white and gray, in the snow-laden boughs, in the great sweep of plain and sky. The women clattered home from market, instead of staying to gossip by the way. Little Dutch-like children, with shrieks of ecstasy, made slides down the steep streets, to the peril of the limbs of passers-by; old people crouched round the stoves, to get what warmth they could in their miserable houses. Instead of this weather lasting, however, there followed abrupt thaws, soft damp days, quite unlike the time of year. The Charville people hardly knew what to make of it. "The cold is unpleasant, but when one has made up one's mind, it may as well come," grumbled old André, the wood-cutter. That is the way with some of us. We are half angry when the evil we have prognosticated is mercifully averted.

On one of these mild afternoons Madame Roulleau took her two children to pay a visit of ceremony; Octavie arrayed in a silk frock, which had been sent to Thérèse with her other possessions — not many — from Ardron, and which she had cut up for Octavie in those first days when she hoped to please. Little Roulleau was in his office; Nannon came to the door to find out whether made-

moiselle wanted her, and at the same moment arrived Monsieur Deshoulières.

"*Bon jour*, Nannon," he said, cheerfully. "So mademoiselle is in the house?"

"She may have gone out with Madame Roulleau," replied Nannon with unblushing promptitude. "As monsieur sees, I have just come."

"No, I saw madame and her children in the distance. Have the goodness to ask mademoiselle to give me the pleasure of five minutes' conversation in the *salon*."

"What eyes he has!" muttered Nannon to herself, going unwillingly up the stairs on her errand. "And yet they are as blue as the very cornflowers. What does he come here frightening that poor child for, I should be glad to know! A man so hard as he has no right to have eyes like that. — If mademoiselle pleases I will say I cannot find her."

"Monsieur Deshoulières!" said Thérèse, crumpling together the work on her lap with a quick, agitated movement, when Nannon made her announcement.

"Shall you see him? Beware, then, mademoiselle. I know these men. Do not yield a thing, or the convent will be thrust down your throat."

"I do not think I care," the girl said, rising wearily, "nothing can be worse than this life."

"Am I to come with you, then, or shall I go on with the work? *Dame!* do they give you such holes to mend!"

"I had better go alone," answered Thérèse, pausing to think over what in a French household is always a breach of etiquette. "There is no one to care," she said to herself bitterly, as she went down.

When M. Deshoulières saw her enter, he started. Her face was pale, thin; there was a heaviness in her movements which his experienced eye noted at once.

"You have been ill, mademoiselle?" he said anxiously. He had come without any very definite purpose; it was, he told himself, to see how she looked, whether she was well and happy. The sight of her sent the blood rushing to his heart, he hardly knew what he was saying. Strong man as he was, he stood there trembling. "You have been ill?" he repeated.

Thérèse shook her head.

"Then something has happened?"

"What should it be, monsieur?" she said, with a half sob which would not be repressed. "I live on from day to day."

"My poor child, is life so hard?"

She looked at him in wonder. What did he mean — he, who was one of her persecutors — by

standing there, saying kind words, and looking down upon her with compassionate eyes? She thought the words would be like Madame Roulleau's, lasting only for a day, and resented them in her heart. He, meanwhile, was thinking of what she had said once, that pathetic little sentence which had sounded in his ears ever since, — "Every place must be a little sad, since I belong to no one." Poor desolate Thérèse! She was shutting up her heart, misjudging even at this moment the man who was yearning to pour out upon her the best gift this world has to offer — a great, unselfish love. She answered his question coldly.

"It will all come to an end one day. Do you want to speak to Monsieur or Madame Roulleau, monsieur?"

He was a little chilled and disappointed. He did not stay to remember that the feelings which had been growing stronger with him week by week, day by day, must be unknown to her. It was unreasonable, perhaps, to expect another answer, and yet he fancied it should have been different.

"I do not want them," he said gently. "I came to speak to you, to know whether you were still contented with these people. You do not look so. Is there any thing I can do?"

"You have heard nothing more from the Lion d'Or?" she asked, evading an answer.

"No," said the doctor, more abruptly. He disliked the subject of this trust, which brought him letters, papers to sign, difficulties, and endless arrangements. Only a week before he had paid another flying visit to Ardron, about a matter which required his personal superintendence, and he made a second attempt upon the imperturbable curé. "Still no news?" inquired the curé, with that slight lifting of the eyebrows which M. Deshoulières found so irritating. "Absolutely no promise of news?" And then he was told of that impotent visit to the Lion d'Or. "And you found no one? Decidedly, monsieur, as you say, there must be imposition somewhere." That was all the doctor could extract, and it was not at all pleasant. "No," he replied to Thérèse, "I wish I could have gone myself; but, after all, it would only have been one fool more. Roulleau says there will be a dozen such absurdities. It is always the case in these affairs. You should have known nothing about it. How came they to be so indiscreet as to cause you the disappointment?"

"It was the children's doing," she said; and then, with a sudden impulse, which astonished herself, she stretched out her hands imploringly. "Promise me, promise me," she said, "always to tell me when there is a little hope like that."

Her eyes were filled with tears, even those few kindly words were breaking down the barriers of pride. He took her hands; he was greatly moved by the child-like appeal. "I promise," he said quietly.

"It is horrible to think that things are being concealed from one."

"You may trust me. But, my child, why are you hungering so terribly after a change? Cannot we make you happy here?"

Something in his voice made her heart stand still with fright. She tried to draw away her hands, but he held them fast, so fast that he almost hurt her. In fact, he did not know what he was doing. He kept his voice under control, but the room swam round. He was only conscious that she was close to him.

"Let me go, monsieur," she said, in a low, hurried voice; and then he recovered himself with an effort.

"Hear me first," he said, releasing her hands; but standing between her and the door, and holding her still more, as she felt, by a certain determination in his voice. "I did not come here meaning to say this; but when I see you looking so changed, so sad, I cannot keep it back. I think I could make you happy. It should be my life's joy. I am old — much older than you, a plain,

rough man; but — child, child, do you know how I love you — ! "

The last words broke from him with a passionate ring. She put her hands before her eyes. "No, no, no!" she cried.

There was a moment's silence. Then he began to speak again, putting a great force upon himself as he did so. "Forgive me. I know you cannot understand — cannot feel as I do. I do not ask for it. I only ask you to let me give you the home you want. You say you belong to no one. It is at least something to have a home," he said in abrupt sentences, with his voice unconsciously tremulous.

Still silence, yet her heart beat so quickly that she fancied its great throbs filled the room. What was this that had come to her? What sudden awakening had changed their positions? And what was it that was offered? — a home — rest — deliverance from bondage, it seemed. She had no love to give; but if he did not demand it? He was not hard, she knew that now, and did him justice. Would it not be easy to put her hand into his, and go away where at least she would find kind shelter? One must be in a position like hers before judging poor, desolate Thérèse for the strength of the temptation. Fabien, who had been gone so long — Fabien, who had renounced her with the rest — Fabien and weary

waiting — unkind words, hard toil, solitude, dreariness, on the one side; on the other, love, tenderness, protection. She hesitated, her heart cried out for these good things, she half put out her hand, and glanced at him with shy, frightened eyes. His own grew more hopeful, more eager, as he noticed the little action.

"Will you trust me? Will you come?" he said in a deep, tender voice. He fancied he could read her maidenly reluctance, her fears; he knew nothing of that other who formed the real barrier between them; he did not even understand what motives half impelled her towards him. He had her hands in his again before she quite knew what he was about. It all seemed to her like a dream. "Can you give me a little love?" he said, smiling. The word awoke her.

"No, no," she cried, wrenching her hands away suddenly. "Oh, what are you saying! Never, never!"

He drew back, terribly hurt. His love deserved a better answer than this, and he knew it. He had spoken from the depth of his heart, and thus he had a right to expect a less indignant rejection. But the next moment pity overcame his anger. She had flung herself into a chair and buried her face on the table, in an attitude so despairing that he forgot himself. He walked quickly to the

window and back, then Thérèse heard his voice, changed, but with a tone in it which thrilled through her.

"At least let me be your friend. Tell me how I have troubled you."

She was hardly conscious of speaking. Perhaps some quickened perception awoke in him in the pain of that moment, and her lips must have framed the name, for he repeated the word "Fabien," under his breath; and then there came a silence, which seemed to her endless.

She looked up at last. He had dropped into a chair opposite to her; his face was very pale and stern. He breathed quickly. Almost involuntarily she said, "Do not be angry with me!"

"Why did I not know this before?" he asked abruptly.

"I thought you might have understood — I could not explain — the others knew," she said, in a broken voice.

"Then your marriage is arranged?"

"Nothing is arranged," she cried out quickly. "My uncle would not hear of it. He wanted Fabien to marry a lady who was noble, and had a large *dot*, and — there were other reasons — but this was one cause why they quarrelled. And it was after he had gone that he wrote those cruel words," she said, her voice faltering.

Max rose up again, and came close to her. "My poor child," he said, "how you must have suffered!" Then, as she was going to speak, he stopped her. "Listen. I do not pretend to tell you that this has not been a heavy shock. If I had but known — but I did not know, I have been ignorant, blundering, blind. You are the first woman I ever loved, and — but I do not blame you. Thérèse, remember that always, there is no one to blame but myself. We will forget all this, and have no more such mistakes, only I must always be your friend. I claim it as a right."

There was a world of simple manliness, of tenderness, in his voice. Thérèse, who had expected reproaches and bitter words, was deeply moved by it. How had she misjudged this man! She had been prejudiced, blind, to the true nobility which lay hid behind a somewhat blunt exterior; until this moment she had recognized nothing of it. She thought how strong he was, how able to protect, to teach her; her poor little weary heart longed for such a helper, even in the midst of its clinging to Fabien. Fabien himself seemed to lose something when she compared the two. For very weariness the conflict might perhaps have ended in Max Deshoulières' favor, if he had chosen that it should do so.

"It is such a long waiting, and those were such hard words," she said, falteringly.

"Foolish words," he said, with a little sad smile. "People cannot renounce so readily, even if they wish it. If you love him, do not doubt him, my child. There are plenty of reasons which may have caused his silence; he has been impetuous and foolish, no doubt, but with such an uncle there are excuses for a young man. Before long we shall hear of him, believe me."

He tried to speak cheerfully. Every word cost him a stab; but for her sake the brave chivalrous heart took this added burden upon itself. Perhaps he guessed something of what she was feeling, and pitied the weakness and inexperience which found it hard to endure. With a pang he put on one side the bright visions which he had been cherishing; all that he could do now was to be her friend and helper, and that he would do faithfully. He saw her brighten under his words; she looked up gladly.

"Fabien will not long stay away, when he knows I am alone," she said, with a renewal of hope. "You are sure no more can be done?"

"I will tell Roulleau to redouble his exertions. You may be sure M. Saint-Martin will not expatriate himself without from time to time making inquiries. Unless, indeed, he is a second Diogenes."

"He was not like Diogenes, at all," said Thé-

rèse, simply. "Oh, monsieur, you have made me so much happier!"

When she had spoken, the cruelty of her words struck her. He was thinking of her, caring for her, and she was taken up only by her own trouble. The contrast was something new to her: as it made itself felt, she reddened painfully, and the tears rushed into her eyes. "Forgive me," she said, tremblingly, "I — I —"

"Are we not to be friends?" he said, with a kind, steadfast look. "And for what are friends good, unless it be to help one another?"

"But —" she stopped.

"But what? Do you think what I have said should prevent me from helping you? Child, child, we learn many things as life goes on. What I told you is true — I have never loved before, I hoped I never should love; I believed I should go through the world, and do the work God put before me alone; I desired nothing more. It came upon me unawares. I do not think that there can have been a time when I did not love you, but I did not know it. And now it has become a part of myself, something which can never be any more separated from me. Hush! do not be frightened. I promise you that you may hear all I have to say without disloyalty to — him. It can never leave me: it has brought me a sorrow, a great sorrow; but

even at this moment — Thérèse, Thérèse, do you think I could part with it? Do you think that I do not even now thank God for this gift? There is a sweetness in it which no suffering can overpower."

Yes, there was a sweetness — all the sweetness of true love. Love, which was generous, and could give without a hope of return; love, which in its friendship, in its self-sacrifice, in its faithfulness, should be like an angel in this man's heart.

Thérèse looked at him with awe. Something in his words stirred her nature to its depths, showed her a height of which she had never dreamed. She had claimed happiness as a right, he accepted sorrow as a blessing. She had found only bitterness where he already spoke of sweetness. She cried out against her lot, he had faith that all should be for good. She had read of these things, she had in some degree thought of them in her devotions; but never before had she seen a life thus influenced, and it came upon her like a revelation.

"And therefore," continued Max, still standing before her, and speaking in the same slow sentences, "you will understand that, though I may not often see you, it must be my greatest happiness to serve you, to be your friend and his. Do not deny me this. Do not fear me."

"I do not fear you," Thérèse answered, quickly.

She wanted to say more, to thank him, but the words would not come. Involuntarily she put out her hand, he caught it, pressed it to his lips, held it there a moment, and was gone. She heard him clattering down the staircase, the little timepiece striking four, Nannon singing country songs to herself in a cracked wiry voice, doors opening and shutting, old familiar sounds with that touch of unreality which sometimes seizes them. The very patch of gray sky opposite to her, against which leafless trees waved solemnly backwards and forwards, looked like a strange, unnatural picture. She was too bewildered to collect her thoughts. Something seemed to have come to her, it may have been fresh hope, a new spring, which made her eye sparkle, and her color rise. Had that echo found a stronger voice which whispered that there was something to be striven for higher than mere happiness? Perhaps. Such voices gather strength if we do not stifle them with our wilfulness.

CHAPTER XII.

"A temple, like a cloud
Slowly surmounting some invidious hill,
Rose out of darkness: the bright work stood still,
And might of its own beauty have been proud.
But it was fashioned, and to God was vow'd
By virtues that diffused, in every part,
Spirit divine through forms of human art.
. . . . . .
Hope had her spire
Star-high, and pointing still to something higher."
WORDSWORTH.

PEOPLE who are compassionate and give themselves heartaches over suffering which seems undeserved, would be wiser and happier if they at least acknowledged other points of view than their own. If they could look at them from all, they would see gain where now they only see cost. No one ever knew what this interview, which had wrung the heart of one, did for Thérèse; not even Thérèse herself, certainly not Max. But it happened at a time when things were very bad with her, when she was losing ground, growing bitter, hard, angry with her lot. She had a feeling as if

no one would help her, and that is a very unwholesome conviction to take root in any one's heart, especially one so young as Thérèse. In the midst of it all there came this revelation. While she believed herself uncared for, this great tender, unselfish love had been growing round her. The love she pictured was exacting, jealous, almost fierce; that which had been opened to her seemed something nobler, more divine. She acknowledged that, while her heart still clung to Fabien. Nay, Fabien had never been so well loved as after Max Deshoulières had shown her his own nobility. She felt her heart-burnings and want of faith so petty! She felt as if she could be more patient, more trustful, more content, now that this man had put before her a living picture of what love might be.

There was, moreover, a little change for the better in her position. Monsieur Deshoulières had noticed that she looked ill and worn, and was not long in pointing out the fact to Mme. Roulleau.

"You are sure that Mademoiselle Veuillot has all that she requires?" he asked, gravely.

Madame Roulleau had not much difficulty in satisfying him; men are slow to suspect cruelty on the part of one woman to another, and he was not suspicious. He thought that she had been fretting, very likely staying too much in the house during the cold weather, wanting occupation. Was there

no one to whom she might go for relaxation and society? Madame assured him that it was mademoiselle's own choice that she confined herself to their own family. "She assists me in the *ménage*, and I am rejoiced that she should teach the children when she is disposed. Poor mademoiselle! her teaching is not much, as monsieur may suppose. But, after all, it gives her occupation, and no one can be happy when they are idle. And they are such excellent children! They have such good hearts! As for my little Adolphe, he adores her!"

This was a very rose-colored account, but it contained nothing to make M. Deshoulières doubt. He felt himself, poor fellow, something of the value of occupation just then. It was a little hard to go through the daily round of sadnesses, complaints, pain; but, after all, they lightened the load on his heart. He gave Madame Roulleau two or three injunctions which made her very uneasy lest he should ask questions from Thérèse, and lose the formidable character with which she had invested him. She went home on the day on which she met him, in a great hurry, and embraced Thérèse. "You want distraction, mademoiselle; you are looking quite pale, you undertake too much. I shall be obliged to forbid your assisting me in these little things" — the girl began to think

that her toil must really be voluntary, madame's words were so decided.

Madame Roulleau was alarmed. She and her husband had not laid any deep plot at the beginning of this affair, they had only wanted, as they told themselves, to be on the watch for such good things as might turn up, and help them out of certain difficulties in which they found themselves plunged so as to threaten *faillite*. When little Roulleau was called to the bedside of the dying man, his keen wits saw at once the possibility of entanglements, difficulties; all so much money in his pocket while M. Deshoulières continued to employ him as notary. This would be at an end directly M. Deshoulières, as *dépositaire*, had fulfilled his trust. The idea of getting hold of Thérèse, and the sum set aside for her maintenance, occurred to him at the very moment that he was taking down M. Moreau's words. At first he thought of no more than this. By little and little other possibilities presented themselves — pieces of good luck he called them. M. Saint-Martin's return was the event which would put a stop to the pleasant little income of which he was already beginning to taste the sweets, and he was able to arrange two or three hindrances in the way of that return. Two South American letters, for instance, found among the papers at Château Ardron, would

have given a clew to the young man's residence, which might have brought him back with inconvenient promptitude. These letters, having been examined by madame, were now no longer in existence. It was not difficult to procure from Paris an answer or two containing just as much as he desired and no more, and purporting to come from an old friend of M. Moreau's, a lawyer, a master at Fabien's *lycée*. It was not difficult, but it was a decided step. M. Roulleau used to awake in the night and think of that step in a cold perspiration. Certain great letters used to dance before his eyes, and shape themselves into something that resembled "Forgery," — an ugly word to haunt people in the middle of the night. Afterwards came that summons to the Lion d'Or. Most likely this is the usual fashion in which crime grows into crime. Nothing very definite at first, a sort of haze over what may happen, a determined shutting of the eyes.

Madame was clever, but she was a dangerous coadjutor, little Roulleau acknowledged it with groans. There was always the risk that her temper might flame out, and ruin their most carefully concocted schemes. She knew it herself: every now and then she put tremendous restraint upon it, but the restraint did not last. The love of tyranny was overpowering. To indulge it upon

Thérèse she used to jeopardize every thing. If Ignace tried to counteract it, he only added fuel to the flame. He lived in continual fear.

Husband and wife would have shared the panic could they have known what had taken place in the little *salon* on that December day, and how nearly it brought M. Deshoulières and Thérèse together. Perhaps Nannon guessed. She was a shrewd old woman. Thérèse was young and scarcely able to conceal her feelings; so there was a soft bright expression in her face which Nannon had never before noticed. She came slowly up the stairs and into the room where the holes were being mended for her without saying any thing, and looked out of the window with eyes which saw a great deal more than the crowded roofs, or even the broad flat plain beyond.

"Mademoiselle might give an opinion," Nannon said at last, affronted.

Thérèse started, turned round, went quickly to her, and gratefully kissed the old brown wrinkled cheek.

"Do you know what you are like?" she said. "You are like one of the fairies who used to come to the help of the poor princesses who were shut up in terrible towers, and forced to do all kinds of hateful work. I don't believe one of them had a worse hole than that to mend."

"I don't know about fairies," answered Nannon, shaking her head doubtfully; "but, if they are evil spirits, it is not very polite of you, mademoiselle, to call me one."

The girl laughed.

"If you lived in the north you would know more about fairies; but here, in this ugly flat country, there is not so much as a bush for them to hide behind. *Allons*, don't be cross, Nannon; not even Rouen has a cathedral like yours. I am going there now; will you come?"

"What has happened?" thought the old woman to herself. Thérèse had not laughed so gayly for many a week past.

They went out, along the narrow street, under the archway at the end, into the Place Notre Dame. A strong wind was blowing from the south-west, all the earth was gray, but the sky was full of glorious lights. A delicate greenish blue made the groundwork; over that lay motionless masses of high clouds, rosy red, here and there broken with purple shadows, serene, majestic; out of one uncovered depth shone a tiny trembling star. Nearer the earth gray rain-clouds were hurrying up; they had blotted out the west and the sinking sun, and now hurled themselves across the plain, with edges torn and rent and twisted by the violence of the driving wind. Broken bits

of vapor scudded before them, veiling for a moment the rosy lights above. It was a strange contrast of peace and unrest. For though the earth was saddened by the driving rain-cloud which was powerless to rob the heavens of their glory, but could blot it out and hide it from the dwellers below, there was peace even with her. In the midst of the rush and tumults — solemn, steadfast, and unmoved — rose up the spires of Charville's great cathedral. Into the drift of the cloud itself, untouched by any ruddy glow from the glowing sky, gray with the shadow of the storm, it pierced the darkness like an eternal prayer. Never more glorious in its beauty, never more faithful in its teaching, than now when it pointed upwards through sadness and gloom. Round about it stood the sentinel statues, just men made perfect, an innumerable company of angels; overhead, flying buttresses lightly clasped the stone, interlacing pinnacles crowned the clustering shafts. From arch to arch, from gargoyle to buttress, from pinnacle to spire, the eye followed its holy guidance, until, above cloud and grayness and the sweep of the whirlwind, it reached the deep light, the burning brightness of the heavens.

One little heart, at least, felt something of all this. It seemed to come like a seal upon what the afternoon had opened to Thérèse; glimpses of a

life in the midst of what was low and base, higher than she had taught herself to realize before. Out of the stones of the earth men had raised the church which pointed to heaven. Out of the little struggles of the day might grow the joys of eternity. The carved figures of the gateways looked at her with kind human eyes; until now they had seemed very far off — saints whose holiness was out of reach, martyrs who were martyrs, and not men. Thérèse used to gaze up at them with admiration, and get a little impatient. But to-day they had come down to her from out of their canopies. She had learned something of the divine lesson which glorifies life, and turns drudgery into an aureole.

The two women went together into the great church. When they came out again it was dark; the clouds were still flying wildly; between the rents stars were shining out. Nannon was a little puzzled over M. Deshoulières' visit and Thérèse's silence; she said, at last, —

"Mademoiselle, has any thing been heard of M. Fabien?"

"Nothing yet. But M. Deshoulières is sure that he will soon come home."

"M. Deshoulières? Hum. Do you know what people are beginning to say?"

"What?"

"They say that even to be *dépositaire* to such a property is a very fine thing, and that M. Deshoulières is perhaps in no hurry to smooth M. Saint-Martin's return."

"They say that! And you can repeat it!" cried Thérèse flashing round upon her. "Nannon, I shall hate you if you believe what wicked people talk. Do you not know how good he is? Have you not told me yourself how much he does?"

"That may be. But he is a hard man for all that," said Nannon, obstinately.

"So you repeat. I do not believe it. I believe there is no man in all Charville so good, so noble, and so generous, as Monsieur Deshoulières," cried the girl, with vehemence.

"So, so! This is new doctrine. What has changed you, then, mademoiselle?"

Thérèse was silent. In the darkness, Nannon could not see her blushes. "Perhaps, because I have only now begun to know him," she said, softly.

"This is not the first time you have met," Nannon answered, with a certain dryness. "*Peste!* this wind is enough to blow one's head off one's shoulders. Well, well, old people can't take these fancies like young ones."

"Yet you have told me yourself about his kindness to your neighbors."

"Oh, for a doctor, yes. That is quite another affair. A doctor, you see, mademoiselle, makes it a part of his trade to be good to the sick. Otherwise, nobody would take his nasty medicines. There would be a revolution, and, who knows, we might find that we could live without doctors. M. Deshoulières is very well when you have need of him. But I have heard it said, 'Never trust a lawyer when you are in peace, a doctor when you are well.' There is another word about curés, only mademoiselle might not like to hear it. Ouf, what a tempest!"

"Nannon, you are not good to-day at all."

"*Pardon*, mademoiselle. It is rather that I think of Jean-Marie."

"Jean-Marie is not at the farm now?"

"No, no; he has tried three masters since M. Gohon. He is too good for them, little angel, that is the truth. He is not like one of those great hulking country boys who have no wits beyond their hands and feet. M. Gohon might have suited him, though."

"But, Nannon, it was not because of that affair at the Halle that M. Gohon dismissed him."

"That is your innocence, mademoiselle; when any one has enemies like that Madame Mathurine and M. Deshoulières, a very little serves. No, no; M. Deshoulières is not good to have to do with, unless one has the fever. Then, certainly —"

"If ever you have the fever, and he cures you, you will not talk of him like this," Thérèse answered, indignantly.

"If I have it I shall send for him, and not for that poor little Pinot, whom I recollect when he was a little creature in leading-strings, tumbling about like a helpless bundle. As if he could tell what was good for anybody! But, mademoiselle, I do not understand. If M. Deshoulières is so excellent as you suppose him, why do you not complain to him of these creatures — these Roulleaus — who insult you with making you slave for them? Perhaps he does not know."

"No, he does not know," answered Thérèse, dreamily. The same thought had come into her own mind. She knew now that she had but to speak, and her life would be lightened of those heavy burdens which had grown so hateful to her. And yet — could she speak? She believed that the sum left by her uncle for her support was, in truth, very inadequate, and she knew nothing of its being even now doubled. Few people might care to receive her; she disliked the idea of being thrown upon M. Deshoulières' charity. And, after all, it might be so short a time before it ended! With his words ringing in her ears, she fancied Fabien might be at the doors. She would rather bear all until he came. Deliverance by him would

be very sweet. With it all there spoke a nobler reason. To take up something of what she had let fall — to redeem months past in idle repining — to live a life that was not ever self-seeking, ever crying out for good things withheld: this was the purpose growing out of that day's events. It was all feeble, imperfect, even in the act of resolution; but it was there.

"No; he does not know," she repeated, as they stood at the door of the Roulleaus' house. "I would rather he did not know. I would rather affairs remained as they are. Good-night, Nannon. It was very good of you to mend those holes."

"Good-night, mademoiselle." The old woman stood and watched the dark figure run lightly up the stairs; then she turned away, shaking her head. "Something has done all this, something has changed her, and yet her heart has not moved from M. Fabien, for I said it to see. The saints forbid that M. Deshoulières should want her to marry him, since he will always have his own way, and the poor child would have to yield. Mend holes, did she say? She has a worse hole in the temper of that madame than any thing I can mend for her. Ah, my cap! — my boy, my boy, there, in the gutter! that white thing! What a torment of a wind! Stop it! Ah, my child, you are a treasure; come and let me embrace you."

CHAPTER XIII.

"There are always a number of people who have the nature of stones; they fall on other persons and crush them. Some again have the nature of weeds, and twist about other people's feet, and entangle them. More have the nature of logs, and lie in the way, so that every one falls over them. And most of all have the nature of thorns." — *Modern Painters.*

MONTHS passed. Charville had its own events to talk about. Madame, the wife of the Préfet, died, there was a change of regiments, a fresh company took the theatre. These were the topics about which people spoke, keeping their own little subjects of interest under the surface, as people do.

Thérèse, who had no one with whom to converse after this fashion, became in time grateful for the hard work which took her thoughts out of the groove along which they travelled incessantly. It seemed as if the key had been put into her hands which opens the treasure-house of life. Before this she had been groping with the wrong instrument. The key lies before us all, only we are so dull and so blind that unless something

forces it upon us we often take no notice, or merely play with it. Not our own, but another's. When we have learned that lesson, the treasure doors fly open.

There had been no news of Fabien, and she was often very sad, very desponding, but never with such a sense of dreariness as before. There seemed something to live for besides that bright hope of happiness which used almost to mock her by its very brilliancy. Her buoyancy came back; she could sing over her work, laugh sometimes at madame's tyranny. Above all, the teaching lost some of its horrors. Octavie was as disagreeable as ever, but Adolphe was more teachable, more affectionate; Thérèse began to feel a little fond of him at the bottom of her heart. She used to tell him stories about her life in Rouen, or legends of the Brittany which was her mother's province. Adolphe was an insatiable listener. "Encore, encore," he would cry peremptorily, and then Thérèse had to begin all over again. Occasionally he would reward her with a story of his own. "Écoute toi," was always the beginning, and then perhaps, "Il y avait un géant." But the giant never accomplished much beyond the mere fact of existence.

The spring this year was unusually early at Charville — unusually early and unusually mild.

When the young green leaves began to show themselves it seemed impossible not to believe but that Fabien would come with them. While people are young — and, thank Heaven, with a good many youth is not to be measured by years — the spring has a brightness which is irresistible. M. Deshoulières, too, with more uneasiness than he liked to confess, felt that tidings should have come by this time. He and Thérèse did not meet very often that winter. Whenever it happened she knew that he was on the watch to prevent her from feeling uneasy or pained by his presence, with a simple straightforward kindness which touched her unutterably. He saw that she was more content, and rejoiced at it. Once or twice he questioned Nannon about her, but the prejudiced old woman would not give him much information. If M. Deshoulières set himself against M. Fabien's return, she thought, what would become of them? Any thing, even Madame Roulleau's conduct, was preferable to such a misfortune. All this while he had another anxiety in his mind. His own sweet dreams of happiness were at an end, the balcony must remain unfilled, no loving eyes watch through the darkness for his return. Utterly and for ever he had put these visions aside. Thérèse loved another. He looked it in the face, and accepted his fate bravely. He understood that she was

young, solitary, weak perhaps, from these circumstances. He had read her heart so well as to know, moreover, that were he to press his own suit, she, out of this youth and solitariness and weakness, might in time give herself to him. I do not say that he scorned the temptation, but that, with a man of Max Deshoulières' nature, it could not so much as exist for one moment in his heart. To him such an advantage would have been an impossibility. To love her was to be bound in all noble fashion to guard her and to help her. Guard her and help her he would; yes, help her, although his own heart lay in the path over which she desired to walk. All this Max, who was little given to self-pity, recognized and accepted; what troubled him with anxious thoughts was the doubt whether Fabien was worthy. It seemed to him as if there was something selfish and petty about the manner in which he had broken away from the difficulties surrounding him; something heartless in his allowing so long a period to pass without communication. Those boyish letters tied up and labelled with a trembling hand were proof of the old man's love. Was Fabien more unforgiving than his uncle? Had he ceased to remember his little playmate? Or — was he dead?

The young horse-chestnut trees budded and blossomed, the great cornfields lay round Charville like

an emerald sea, everywhere there was the pleasant stir of spring, the smell of fresh-turned earth, the women hoeing and weeding in the fields, above them the larks singing jubilantly. The time of M. Moreau's death came and passed away. There was no news of Fabien. Madame Roulleau began to feel as if all prospered.

Every one talked about the early season, the warmth of the spring, but the doctors, it was noticed, made no answer to these congratulations. Monseigneur at the Evêché, the Préfet, and a few of the leading men were aware of the cause of this silence. Certain of the number had it dinned persistently into their ears by M. Deshoulières whenever he had the chance, or could make it. What healthiness Charville possessed it owed to its situation, to the broad plains around, and the winds that rushed up and carried away the foul, bad exhalations. The town itself was shamefully mismanaged. The narrow streets, the old tumbledown, crowded, picturesque houses went on from year to year untouched, and the population increased and were crammed into the same space as their forefathers occupied with a quarter of their number. The old walls no longer existed, it is true, except in name, and the people had broken through, crossed the river, and spread out a straggling suburb. But all the houses in that part were

miserably squalid, and lay low with water standing about them, so that they were, to say the least, no less unhealthy than the habitations in Charville proper.

There was always illness. But this year there was something about the illness which caused considerable anxiety to the doctors. Something in the way in which a fever clung and lingered, and sprang up, and held its ground, even when it was winter, with snow and frost on the ground, and it was not, as Nannon said with indignation, fever weather. It was this impossibility of beating it out which made M. Deshoulières speak of it with gravity. People laughed at him for it. "Fever? But, monsieur, there is always fever at Charville. It is almost an institution."

"Monsieur le Préfet, it is an institution with which we could well dispense."

"*Eh bien*, we shall see. It seems to me you are disturbing yourself unnecessarily. Next winter, perhaps, there may be a possibility of accomplishing some of these improvements that you so much desire. My dear monsieur, you do not know how many important matters call for my devotion to them at this moment."

M. Deshoulières had some idea. There was an old underground cave at Charville, where the Préfet proposed establishing his mushroom-beds. It

was a scheme with which the wants of the town could not possibly be expected to interfere. He went home terribly disheartened.

The Bishop did his best for him, but, as he had said, he was an old man, and in his comfortable room in the Evêché, he could not, perhaps, estimate the extent of the danger. After all, too, this danger depended in great measure upon certain conditions. There had been a warm, damp spring. If the summer were unusually hot the chances were very much in favor of the fever. Otherwise it might tide over again, carry off one here, one there, and not at all interfere with the Préfet's mushroom-beds. M. Deshoulières was looked upon as an uncomfortable prophet. Why should he talk of evils before they arrived? He would not consent to hold his peace as they desired, but he was thrown very much upon his own resources. A little beyond the suburbs I have described, a hospital had been built, the Hospital St. Jean. M. Deshoulières busied himself with improving its working capabilities. He had a certain authority there of which he made good use. And it seemed to him as if there was little else he could do. The men in whose hands power rested met him with the never-failing "*nous verrons*," which did not abate his indignation, and the poor clung to their poverty and their filth.

And meanwhile the fever gained a little ground. It was of a low typhoid character, and it kept entirely in the lower town. As yet not a single case had occurred elsewhere to frighten the mothers when they looked at their little ones sleeping, with, perhaps, a little flush upon the soft sweet cheek. The lower town was privileged, as it were, to possess a certain amount of unhealthiness, and no one troubled their heads much about the matter except the doctors, whose business it was supposed to be. It was a lovely summer. There was the promise of an abundant harvest, always an important question in Charville. The plains, flat and ugly as they were, could boast a certain beauty in their aspect of fertility. Little stone-colored villages, with a church in the centre of each, were dotted here and there. Canals or small streams trickled slowly along, the course of the river was broken by water-mills, every thing seemed full of fat promise. The sun glowed down upon it all, — a peaceful, contented scene. What more was wanted? The Préfet looked at it one day from his window with a smile of satisfaction, and went away to his mushroom-beds. He saw Monsieur Deshoulières in the distance, and crossed over to avoid him. "That man has become a perfect pest," he said severely. "I incline to think that after all there may be something in these stories

that one hears now and then about him and the old man who died. It appears to me that he never knows when to be content, and discontent is the mother of all the vices, one with which, I am thankful to say, I have no sympathy."

"It is the bane of our century," said Monsieur de Blainville, with whom he was walking.

"Precisely. And in my opinion the Government should put it down with more determination than they do."

"Hydra-headed, remember."

"*Raison de plus, mon cher.* In this century we should be able to cope with monsters. *Allons!* I long for your opinion about the depth of the beds. You say eighteen inches, and my man maintains twenty to be the minimum depth. I shall hear the reason on both sides before deciding. It is an important question, on which one should not pronounce hastily."

About a week after, Thérèse, who had resumed her favorite walks by the river, asked Nannon:

"What is this about the fever? I heard Monsieur Roulleau talking of it yesterday."

"There is no use in talking, particularly when it is a little creature like that who talks. All they may say will not stop the fever."

"It increases then?"

"Increases? But yes. This morning we hear

that it is in our street. Louise Gouÿe's child, of whom I have sometimes told mademoiselle, has it."

"What, that pretty little blue-eyed thing?"

"Yes, yes. The poor mother is in despair."

"But, Nannon, it seems to spread terribly. Can nothing be done? What does Monsieur Deshoulières say?"

The old woman made a gesture of impatience. "Monsieur Deshoulières is always poking and meddling — for what good? All the doctors in the world will not stop the fever if it pleases the good God to send it to us. If He means it to come it will come. I have heard my mother talk of it years ago in Charville, just the same. She lost her father and two brothers — fine strong young men they were — and the dead lay there in the houses, for they could not get any one to bury them. Mademoiselle sees that it was intended. What the doctors have to do is to try and cure the people who catch it."

Indifference in the rich, fatalism in the poor, helped the fever along mightily. A dry, hot summer succeeded to the green promise of the spring. When July came the plains lay scorching under the fiery sunshine, and fever raged in Charville like a pestilence.

CHAPTER XIV.

"And looking down I saw the old town lie
Black in the shade of the o'erhanging hill,
Stricken with death, and dreary."
The Earthly Paradise.

IT had come in earnest indeed. Creeping on by little and little, holding the ground it had conquered, fastening every day on fresh territory, the fever was no longer the shadow with which M. Deshoulières did his best to frighten obstinate men, but a grim reality. In the narrow, picturesque, ill-ventilated streets it struck down whole families with deadly effect. Day after day the fierce sun glowed relentlessly overhead, the air throbbed like that at the mouth of a furnace, foul smells rose out of the earth. The churches were crowded, the terrified people put up passionate prayers for rain, for something to lessen the intolerable heat. The Préfet sent for M. Deshoulières.

"This is terrible," he said. "What are we to do?"

"You must ask others that question, Monsieur

le Préfet. I have now no time for the work of prevention."

"We must draw cordons, endeavor to separate the infected streets."

"Whatever is done, permit me to offer you my last piece of advice. Lose no more time."

There was a bright indignant flash in the doctor's eye, of which the Préfet was not unconscious: M. Deshoulières could not restrain it when he thought of the wasted warnings.

The Préfet was no coward. He went down into the fever-stricken districts, and did his utmost at last to stir the people into exertion. But a kind of despairing apathy hung over them. They resented the attempt to move them into fresh houses. "Better die where one has lived," was the unfailing answer.

Among the higher classes a panic prevailed, whole families fled; but after a time, when the fever raged more fiercely, the neighboring towns refused to receive them, and Charville was shunned as a plague-stricken place. The hospital of Saint Jean was full to overflowing; other buildings were hastily fitted up, still more room was needed, and more nurses required. Sisters were sent from the convent, and then the fever attacked the convent itself, and more could not be spared. Others came from Paris, and yet hands were wanted. The doc-

tors were overworked and were in despair. Those who are able to thank God that they have never seen the horrors of a pestilence have no conception of the blight which hangs over the doomed town. There are a certain number who laugh and jest through it all; strange to say, perhaps the number increases as the evil days close in. There are balls, dances, theatres; it is the policy of the authorities to keep up the hideous mask of gayety, lest people should realize too truly what is beneath. But every thing seems to lie under the ban of fear. A truth, a rumor, becomes a terror, a hundred exaggerated reports add to the actual horrors. Thank God, again, you who have never known it.

In all Charville, perhaps, the most miserable and the most frightened of those who had what Nannon called the fever fright, was little Monsieur Roulleau. He wanted to go away when first it broke out in any severity, but madame was inexorable. Between his fear of her and his fear of the fever he did not know what to do.

"Zénobie," he would say imploringly, "it is so long since we have had any change!"

"It will be longer yet," answered madame, with decision. "You are foolish to attempt to blind me, Ignace. Do you not suppose I know why you want to go?"

For a time she held him in check, but at last

the other fear became the strongest. He came in one day with his face white and his hand shaking.

"There is a case in Place Notre Dame."

"What of that?"

"It is my nerves. They are not like yours, my angel. If we stay here longer I shall have it by to-morrow. I feel it. And the children — "

"Bah! What folly! Do you not know that if this fever carries off some, there will be others wanting to make their testaments? Do you not know that your work will be doubled? Hé! Answer me that!"

Her voice had risen to its stormy pitch, but Ignace was beyond caring.

"I must go," he said, feebly.

Madame looked at him steadily. She saw that he was speaking truth. He must go, or if he stayed he would soon become a victim to his terror. "Attend then," she said, changing her tone and speaking with a touch of scorn. "You shall go."

"Zénobie, my treasure — "

"Hush. You shall go, I say. My mother at Tours will take you in, and you may, if you choose, depart at once. — Charles has been clerk long enough to understand the business with my superintendence."

"Perfectly, perfectly. You need have no apprehension on that score. To tell the truth, my health is become so indifferent that even without this unhappy state of things I must have sought a little rest."

Madame looked at him with a peculiar expression in her face.

"That is settled then, monsieur. And I and the children, we remain here?"

"If you think it best, my dear Zénobie. I have the most supreme confidence in your discretion," said the little man, eagerly. "You will, without doubt, be in perfect security. It is I only who am called out by the peculiar nature of my avocations, who really run any risk. You will remain here with Mademoiselle Veuillot."

"With Mademoiselle Veuillot. Exactly."

There was something not unlike a thunder-cloud in the extreme quietness of madame's manner, but the little notary went on unheeding:

"The last letter that was forwarded from Château Ardron we did not answer, you will remember. It was your idea that it might have been supposed to have miscarried. Another would, do you not think so, require a different treatment?"

"*Allez*," said madame, more sharply. "Will you then not stay and conduct the affair yourself?"

The threat had the effect of stopping all Monsieur Roulleau's injunctions. He was restless and anxious to be gone. Thérèse, when she heard of it at their dinner, had no difficulty in discovering the motive, although husband and wife put it upon business at Tours, which required his presence. Nannon confirmed her idea.

"I shall not soon forget his face when I told him it was so near." *It* meant the fever at this time in Charville.

"Will it come to us I wonder, Nannon?"

"*Dame*, who knows? It has its road and it will keep to it. One or two have died of fright, that I do know, for I heard M. Deshoulières say so."

Nannon's cheery old face had grown sad and haggard. She knew too well what was going on.

"This heat will kill us all, I believe," said Thérèse, sighing. "I feel as if I would give any thing to get down by the river. Do let me go, Nannon!"

"Mademoiselle must not dream of it," answered the old woman with decision. "As it is, I believe Monsieur Deshoulières would say I was doing wrong in coming up here. But he positively forbade me to let mademoiselle pass through those streets."

Amid all his labors he had thought of her.

"Do you love Monsieur Deshoulières better by this time?" asked the girl, suddenly.

There was a minute's silence.

"Monsieur is admirable at present," said Nannon at last, stubbornly. "Admirable. But then it is his *métier*, mademoiselle must understand. It has absolutely nothing to do with those other matters we have talked about. For the sick he devotes himself like a saint. I do not know how he can do all he does. If it were not for mademoiselle I believe I should go to him and ask to be allowed to nurse. One can do that though one is old and stupid. And they want nurses so terribly, the poor things."

"How I wish I might be one."

"Mademoiselle! You!"

"Yes, I. Do you think nobody can have any good idea but you?"

"Mademoiselle jests."

"On such a subject!" Thérèse answered, gravely.

"But mademoiselle might catch the fever."

"One would suppose you were talking to Monsieur Roulleau," said the girl, with impatience. "What makes my life of greater value than the lives of those good women who risk theirs now? Bah, Nannon! I did not expect you to take the fever fright."

"It is not for myself. I am no longer in my youth; the fever, or whatever it may please the good God to send, will be all one to me soon," answered the old woman, unconsciously pathetic. "But with mademoiselle it is different. She is young and inexperienced, and does not know what she is asking. It is all too sad for her."

"Is it very dreadful at the hospital?"

"Not so bad as in the houses where the poor things are all together, one lying dead on the floor and another unconscious by the side; and then there is the weeping and the wailing which they manage to shut out of the hospital."

Thérèse shuddered.

"Oh, Nannon, if it would but rain!"

She said no more on the subject, but one day when she was alone she ventured a little way along one of the least affected of the lower streets, one which was not closed like certain of the others to the public. Yet this struck the girl as being deserted: the old sleepy cheerfulness that she remembered was gone, no knots of chatterers stood about, one or two people might be seen on their stone house-steps, but they looked sad and spiritless. The workshops were shut up, a heavy languid, stagnant air was about the place. It seemed the sadder for that brilliant sunshine streaming down upon it all. The poor pet flowers

drooped thirsty and uncared for. Thérèse felt a sense of frightened guilt in being there. It was as if she had no right to intrude, as if — as, indeed, was the case — she had come into the valley of the shadow of death. From the door of one house some little children looked at her wonderingly; she stopped, wishing to speak to the poor little things; and then she heard inside low feeble moans, which scared her away. Her heart was beating fast, a strange sort of oppression had seized hold of her; Nannon was right, she thought, she had not known for what she was wishing. The street was full of angles and twists and crookednesses; she went on a little further, stumbling over the rough paving and gasping for breath, it was so stifling between the tall overhanging houses. Always the same deserted look, the bright cruel sunshine, the hot sickening smells, the horror of a nameless something in the air. Thérèse could bear it no longer: the moans she had heard were in her ears, her heart beat almost to suffocation, and she turned and ran back with all her might.

Afterwards in her room she reproached herself and cried bitterly over what she called her cowardice. It was not cowardice, although she would have it so. If she had been brought face to face with the fever she would not have feared it. It

was imagination which had conquered her, — imagination acting upon Nannon's keenly drawn pictures, and quickened by the most vivid impression she had yet received of the heavy, death-laden atmosphere. But she did not make this excuse for herself. She felt humiliated, almost desperate with shame. The next day she went to the curé at a neighboring church, and spoke more freely than was her wont, although she told him nothing of a half-formed resolution. Perhaps he did not quite understand her, but he helped her as much as he could; Thérèse had never before looked upon him as so nearly a friend.

Then she went back to Rue St. Servan, and sought Madame Roulleau. Madame was sitting in the office, with a pen behind her ear, and her thin hair drawn up tighter, doing her husband's work with considerable acerbity. She would not in the least have minded bearing its whole weight upon her shoulders had it not been that certain foolish legal impediments in the way of women cut her off from the most lucrative part of his profession. It was a folly, but it was undeniable. And Ignace's cowardice just now stood in the way of golden gains. No wonder that madame was sharp in the midst of her astonishment at seeing Thérèse before her.

"You were speaking yesterday of the children

having their vacation, madame," said Thérèse quietly. "I am thinking of taking advantage of it to leave you for the present."

Madame laid down her papers, stood up behind the bureau, and resting her hands on it said, in a low furious voice, "You are going?"

"For a time only, I repeat, madame."

"Oh, I comprehend. It is the fever-fright that has hold of you," she said, contemptuously. "Understand, however, mademoiselle, that by leaving Charville you lose even the pitiful sum provided for your support."

Thérèse winced under the scorn as the young do wince. She grew very red, and said quickly, "You are mistaken, madame. What I propose doing is to offer myself as a nurse at the hospital. I have no intention of leaving Charville."

"You! A nurse!"

"Exactly so, madame."

"See then," cried madame, volubly, sinking back among her papers, — "see then how the ingratitude I knew would come to pass, has come! We take her in when no one else would do so, nourish her as a daughter, disarrange ourselves, slave, — when I think of it, there is nothing we have not done. Ah, my poor Ignace, what will it not cost you to learn that I was right!"

"What have I said?" asked Thérèse, appalled at the storm.

"Oh, do not consider it, do not consider us, mademoiselle. If others may think it base that at the time when my husband's health has failed, and I must struggle for bread for my children, you should take the opportunity of depriving them of even that little which might assist them, I say nothing. I make no reproaches, I leave them to your own heart."

Thérèse drew herself up proudly. "You talk strangely, Madame Roulleau," she said. "At one moment I am a burden, at another an assistance. Do not fear for the little you receive from me. So long as I am provided with a bare support, the rest may remain in your hands until my return. Only these scenes are not agreeable."

Madame recognized her false step, and did her best to retrieve it. She calmed, not suddenly, but by degrees, and tried to draw out the girl's sympathy for her position, with so many business matters on her hands. There was the risk that Thérèse might catch the fever and die, but she did not dread the fever herself sufficiently to fear that inconvenience greatly. At all events Thérèse meant to go, and therefore it only remained for her to put matters in the best train for herself. The girl, who was sweet-tempered, came round before long. Madame threw herself into her idea at last with enthusiasm. But Thérèse shook her head when she asked her plans.

"I am going at once, and I do not think I shall come back again," was all she would say.

Then she went upstairs, put what things she wanted quietly and expeditiously into a bundle, and left the house. "M. Deshoulières may not allow it," madame had objected, and Thérèse, who thought the same, was bringing some feminine tact to bear upon that probability. She was passing the Cathedral, but suddenly turned and went in. There was a little dark corner in a side aisle, which only caught a few rays of light through the nearest window, gorgeous with painted glass in glowing prodigality of color. She drew her chair there and knelt down. Presently, far away in the choir, half-a-dozen priests began reciting their office with deep, rich voices. Thérèse fancied it was like the distant roll of the sea. There was not much music in it, but it was full and solemn-sounding; she stopped her prayer and listened. And then her heart went up in a cry, "O my God, make this work I desire a psalm of Thine."

She went out of the Cathedral, crossed the Place, and turned down the street from which she had fled only the day before. There was the same strange oppressive stillness about it, but her steps only faltered for a moment. Then she went on bravely, except that she drew her breath a little quicker. She reached the house from which

the children had looked out at her, her heart sank a little when she saw they were not there; she had somehow trusted to them as friends. A woman came to a narrow quaint window opposite and stared indifferently at her. Thérèse went slowly up the steps, hot from the burning sun, and softly opened a door.

If it was hot outside, what was this room like? It was all she could do in her first horror to keep her ground, and not to run away as once before. She stood still, however, and a woman, who was sitting by a low miserable bed, glanced languidly at this strange young figure who was standing there with the old street behind her, and the glow of the sunshine round her head. In another minute or two Thérèse recovered herself and came forward timidly.

"Can I do any thing for you?" she asked in a low voice full of awe.

"No."

It was not repulse, but simply despair.

"I think I could help you a little," Thérèse said gently. "Once my aunt had a fever, and I used to nurse her. And you seem so ill yourself."

This time there was no answer. The woman, who had her arm on the pillow of the bed, on which lay a girl, a little younger than Thérèse, neither moved nor objected, but watched mechan-

ically while Thérèse drew off the quilt from the bed, fastened open the window, and moistened the lips of the sufferer, who was unconscious of her presence. Afterwards the woman said she had believed it was the Blessed Virgin, or one of the saints, who came in so strangely; but even this conviction did not astonish her. She sat there, and watched dully until the sick girl started up, and poured out a wild torrent of delirious words. They were obliged to hold and soothe her while it lasted; but when it was over she sank down in utter exhaustion.

"Is there medicine to give her?" asked Thérèse.

The woman nodded, and pointed to a bottle, on which the directions were clearly written. Thérèse poured out the quantity and gave it to her.

"See there," she said cheerfully; "she is tranquil now. Is she your daughter?"

"My daughter," answered the woman in a low hoarse voice. "As you know, her father is dead, and they have just carried him away. I have had it, too, and she nursed me."

Thérèse, wondering over the phrase "as you know," asked where were the children.

"M. Pinot has taken them."

"Is M. Pinot coming again?"

"He or the other. I do not know," said the woman wearily. She would not speak again, but

she did not interfere with any of Thérèse's movements. The girl found wine in a bottle, and made her drink a little, after she had poured some between poor Fanchon's lips; the same girl who had chattered so merrily at the fountain the year before. Then she heated some soup for the poor mother, and made the room look a little less deplorable than it had done when she entered it. Her fear had left her utterly — a great pity had swallowed it. But her heart beat fast, when as evening was coming on she heard a step at the door.

It was M. Deshoulières. Thérèse saw that with a glad throb, but she was standing a little behind the door in the shadow, and he came in quickly, and passed to the bed without noticing that a third person was in the room. Neither did he speak for a few moments, but at last turned to the poor mother and said, —

"This is good. She is a little better. Have you given her the medicine?"

The woman pointed behind him and said, —

"She has," and M. Deshoulières turned round and saw Thérèse.

She trembled violently, fearing lest after all she had done wrong, and then she looked in his face and saw a sudden agony in it, and recovered herself at once.

He crossed the room and stood before her in the

dim corner, at first speechless. When he did at last speak, his voice was so changed, so rough and broken, that she hardly recognized it.

"Child, child!" he said, "what madness have you done?"

"Do not send me away," she said, gently. "I could not help it, I could not sleep at night for thinking of all this misery. And what was there to keep me? I am free if any one in the world is free. You must let me remain. I am not afraid."

He answered her sharply, like a person in keen pain.

"What you ask is impossible, ridiculous! I insist upon your returning at once."

Thérèse shook her head.

"I cannot go back to the Roulleaus from this house. You see that, do you not, monsieur? It would be simply wicked."

"Then I must find you a lodging. Heavens, mademoiselle, what has possessed you?"

She did not answer. He looked at her there in the gray dusk, the little window open behind her, the old blackened discolored walls, the poor meagre fittings, the wretchedness around, and she standing, so womanly, so brave, so patient, as she was under his upbraidings. He longed to take her hand and draw her away out of that hot foul atmosphere. He could give himself without a

murmur, but his heart cried out against her making a choice like this. Is it not always easier to give ourselves than to give our dearest?

"Come," he said, almost passionately.

But she made no movement. She only said, —

"If you order it, I must go, of course. But what would be the good? If any mischief is done it must be done by this time. Pray, pray let me stay!"

She had the advantage of being perfectly self-possessed, while he was deeply moved and very pale.

"I will find some one to come here. Indeed, you must not remain."

She saw he was wavering.

"Then let me go to the hospital. You know you want nurses."

"Yes, but they are trained, experienced nurses that we want."

"I can learn quickly," Thérèse said, eagerly. "*Allons*, M. Deshoulières, when those that you seek come, I can go away. Or leave me here."

"No, no," he answered again. "This is far worse than the hospital. How could you be so imprudent?"

"You are going to accept me," she said, joyfully.

He took her hand and looked into her face.

"Do you know what you are asking? Do you know what you must bear? Have you courage enough, strength enough, devotion enough?"

There was a little silence, and then Thérèse looked up and answered, humbly, —

"No. But, monsieur, I will ask for all these; and I think that, perhaps, He who has given me the will will send me what I want."

After that he could say no more. He may have put up a different prayer for her in his own heart, but of it she knew nothing. He said no more to her; he promised the poor, half-stupefied mother that some one should be sent for the night, and then those two went away together. It was evening now, the sun had set, a golden glimmer just lingered on the plains. Far away, in other parts of bright France, the goats would be trooping home from breezy uplands in tinkling herds, soft sweet breezes tossing the hay, fresh mountain streams gurgling along their rocky beds, dewy grass waving, leaves rustling: here, the hot thirsty air still filled the narrow streets, the summer evening brought no relief from the invisible pestilential cloud that hung and penetrated, and stifled. Together those two went — under the quaint houses, so sadly stricken, along the rough pavement, over which many little feet were never now any more to patter — solemnly and silently, be-

cause their hearts were very full, and a great shadow hung over them. They passed under an ancient gateway, crossed a bridge ; and, in another few minutes, the two — still silent — went together up a flight of steps, and into the hospital of St. Jean.

CHAPTER XV.

"They serve God well,
Who serve His creatures."
The Lady of La Garaye.

THE first person who confronted them within the hospital doors was Nannon. She had learned Thérèse's intentions from Madame Roulleau, and had come away at once with the hope of changing what she fancied was no more than a girl's foolish excited whim. Thérèse's delay had frightened her even more than the first hearing of her scheme; and now, when she saw her enter with M. Deshoulières, after a momentary sensation of relief, her heart sank with the conviction that if M. Deshoulières was in favor of her being so cruelly sacrificed, not all the talking in the world would take her away from the place. And, indeed, Thérèse stopped her first exclamation.

"Hush, Nannon. It is of no use. Every thing is decided."

The old woman was so aghast that she fell back

at once upon her strongest card, which she had intended reserving for the end of her arguments.

"Mademoiselle — listen then — mademoiselle, what would M. Fabien say?"

"M. Fabien!" M. Deshoulières, who was a little in advance, turned round and said this. They all looked at one another for a moment, and then he went on slowly and quietly: "She is right. We have not thought enough. I implore you, mademoiselle, for the sake of Monsieur Saint-Martin, to return with her to the upper town."

The light from a lamp fell on his head. Nannon said to herself admiringly, "After all he has a noble face, that man." Thérèse answered quickly, holding herself at her full height as she spoke, "Do you think I have not thought of him? Do you think any one I loved would keep me back?"

At another moment she could not have spoken out her heart's affection in such a manner, shyness and custom would have prevented it; but now something seemed to demand it, her allegiance to Fabien, she thought. Max Deshoulières, looking at her reverently, said, within himself, "I pray, I pray to Heaven, she is not judging him from her own capacities only." Nannon was silent, as people are when some strong feeling makes itself known in their presence; Thérèse was resolute and decided, her step light, she did not look like

one who would consent to change; and M. Deshoulières, if he had been moved, was quiet again. All the old woman could do was to ask to share the nursing; and, finally, she gained permission to become a sort of medium of communication between the hospital and the outer world, to fetch what was needed, and carry messages to a house about a kilomètre away, where convalescents were tended by one of the trained sisters. After which M. Deshoulières, who felt an uncomfortable conviction that he had been persuaded against his judgment and his wishes, fetched another sister, and delivered Thérèse into her keeping.

"No work to-night, remember," was his last order as he hurried away.

"Then you will be on day duty," said the Sister, kissing her at once, and looking at the pretty young face with a little brisk wonder. "That is best. You shall sleep with me and with Sister Gabrielle. We want more nurses sadly, only — my child, I look at you because you are so young, and I wonder. Did your mother let you come? — ah, ah, I guess what you would say. You are right. Yes, there were many of the blessed saints younger than you; let me see, there was S. Lucy, S. Faith, S. Prisca — "

She ran on with a long list of names, all the while leading the girl up the broad staircase, with its

stone balustrade. It was impossible to put in a word; but her cheery voice and bright little apple-face looking out of its black drapery gave the best welcome that Thérèse could have received. Every thing was hopeful. The patients were better, a great many of them. It was only a fever, and what was that to the plague? Now, if they had lived in the East, it might have been the plague. It was certain there would be rain soon. And those who were ill were so patient and so good it was a delight to nurse them. All that she touched grew bright; it was Thérèse's turn to look at her in wonder. But when Sister Gabrielle came in to the clean, tiny room to take her appointed hours of sleep, Thérèse gave a little jump of glad surprise. It was the same *réligieuse* as she had watched and heard on the day when she felt so sad and so desolate under the great Cathedral; the one whose sweet calm voice she remembered with its quieting, "Soyez tranquille, mon enfant." She remembered also the beautiful face, paler and thinner now, but only more beautiful still. There was a rare fascination and power about this woman, — the clearest common-sense, and a spirituality which exalted it. Little Sister Annette became more silent directly, and treated her with affectionate reverence. She acted as head alike to the sisters and the lay nurses, and said a few words

to Thérèse upon her duties which touched and strengthened the girl unspeakably. She was half-frightened, half-glad, to be there; but she would not have gone back for the world, and although she went to bed assured that sleep would never come, the "Soyez tranquille" returned in dreams.

After that night she had no more dreams. She slept too heavily when the time for sleeping came. M. Deshoulières had done well to warn her, Sister Gabrielle to strengthen her for it; there was so much that was terrible and ghastly and full of horror. Not fear. There was no time for fear. But she was very young and tender-hearted, and somehow, at first, she had expected to see more relief, and to have the consolation of soothing these poor souls more than she found by experience to be the case. By and by she understood her position better, and was content to look for less, and yet Sister Gabrielle told her, smiling, that she was one of the most popular nurses among them all.

French organization is the most perfect in the world, but the fever beat the organization. If all that M. Deshoulières wanted had been done, there would scarcely have been room enough for the fresh patients. As it was, there was over-crowding and over-work. Now and then a nurse failed, and was carried away to the infirmary at the convent. It was found that such as fell ill for the

first time at the hospital could not recover there, and so they were taken away at once. The precautions to avoid spreading the infection were strongly enforced. Still it spread. People went about the streets softly, with an awe-struck look on their faces. There were special services, litanies. Day after day the fierce sun beat down on Charville; day after day the fever smote its victims; day after day such doctors and such nurses as were spared were at their posts, fighting it.

M. Deshoulières seldom spoke to Thérèse, unless it was to give special orders, and she was quite unconscious how narrowly he watched her during this terrible time. He was ready to interfere at once if she flagged. But she did not flag. Her eye was brighter, her face was alive with keener energy than he had seen in it yet. At first she had a great deal to learn, but by and by it became evident that among all the brave women who labored there as women can labor, there was not one more self-denying, more courageous, more tender than Mademoiselle Veuillot. Where patient watching was needed, in cases where it seemed impossible not to shrink, she stood her ground. When speech failed, and only mute gestures, difficult to interpret, remained to the sufferer, those pitiful gray eyes were quick to read the hidden meaning. When these, too, ceased, and death fol-

lowed upon his shadow, more than once dying looks or dying lips faltered blessings upon the faithful nurse who stood there faithful to the last.

And so it arrived that Sister Gabrielle told her that she was one of the most popular nurses among them all.

M. Deshoulières watched and wondered. She was different from what she had been. He had known her well enough to know that. But he was ignorant how the change had come, or, rather, how her character had thus ripened and opened out. Perhaps it was the outbreak of a heart tender enough to overcome selfishness. Perhaps there was a touch of shame about it that her own trials had seemed so unendurable, now that she was brought face to face with what we call life's great realities. Least of all did he think, when he had time to think, which was not often, that his own example had any thing to do with it. Yet so it was. Thérèse had never been the same since that day when he and she had spoken together; and, seeing him in the heart of his work at the hospital, she owned that even yet she had not done him justice.

For now she could understand more fully what a great, noble heart was this man's. She could understand why a soft light came into Sister Gabrielle's eyes when she spoke of him — the sort

of reverence with which the attendants in the wards obeyed his bidding. It seemed to her as if he, single-handed, did more to keep them all at work in the most efficient manner, than the other members of the staff put together. It seemed to her as if a great deal of the bravery and the cheerfulness which distinguished the workers grew in some fashion out of this bravery and cheerfulness which never failed. Always at his post, ready with keen promptitude to decide the crowd of doubtful questions brought for his opinions, accepting responsibilities from which others shrunk, — "My friend, the Minister of Health is in Paris, and I am here," Thérèse heard him say one day, in answer to a timid objection from little M. Pinot, — quick to note the first symptom of over-fatigue among the band of nurses; encouraging Sister Annette's merry little sayings; swift, patient, tender, inflexible, all at once. It was here that she first realized Max Deshoulières' kingdom.

Fanchon was well again. M. Deshoulières found means to let her know that. Nannon told her that the fever had not spread in the upper town; there were only a few isolated cases. Madame Roulleau had said that when there had been a little rain to cool the air, M. Roulleau would return.

"Otherwise I think she will fetch him," said

Nannon, laughing; "and, *dame*, I believe the fever would be less terrible to him than madame with her claws out."

"But will it ever rain again!" answered Thérêse, who was walking by a cornfield in the early morning. All the nurses were compelled to be in the open air for half an hour daily, and she had been on night duty lately.

People asked that question a hundred times in the day. The sky, with its bright sunny beauty, had grown quite terrible and fierce in their eyes. Water was becoming scarce, the air was so heated that the nights scarcely cooled it at all; while all this continued it was scarcely possible that the fever should subside.

One day there was great sorrow in the hospital. Kind little Sister Annette, whom every one loved, became dull, lost her appetite, and complained of headache. Within an hour, M. Deshoulières had taken her himself to the convent, and a rumor got about that it was a bad case. They missed her terribly. Her kindly, hopeful chatter had done more than any of them knew to keep their spirits from sinking. Somehow it was difficult to imagine her to be ill. Thérèse said so to Sister Gabrielle one day in their little room, which two other sisters shared with them now; and then Sister Gabrielle took her in her arms, and kissed her,

and said, with a spasm of pain working her beautiful face, "She is not ill any longer, our dear sister; she is at rest."

Thérèse nearly broke down herself after this. Probably she would have done so altogether if it had not been for M. Deshoulières and Sister Gabrielle, who watched her wisely and tenderly, and sent her more into the cornfields with Nannon. The days came and went, she scarcely knew how time passed, or that it was nearly five weeks since first she came to the hospital. It seemed, at last, as if the fever was stationary — the number of cases neither diminished nor increased.

But the sky was as fierce as ever.

One afternoon it changed. A grayness gathered over it, not big satisfactory clouds, but still something of the nature of cloud. A few scattered drops fell, enough to make large round holes in the white dust, and then it all cleared away, and the stars came out, and on the next morning the sun was braving it as undauntedly as he had done for those weary weeks past, and the Charville world was gasping and panting, and trying to make merry, with the thermometer at 90° in the shade, with pestilence upon them, and drought at their very doors. Madame Roulleau, who had said that Ignace should not return until there had been rain, was frantic at the delay. There were

cases of sunstroke among the reapers, a few old feeble people died literally of exhaustion from the stifling heat. Monseigneur at the Evêché had been at death's door, and had driven them all distracted by refusing to allow M. Deshoulières to be called away from his other work, until he became so weak that his will had no longer any power of influencing them, and M. l'Abbé took matters into his own hands. But, indeed, those evil days brought out rare instances of devotion.

There came, at last, one day and night which exceeded every day and night that had gone before. Each door and window in the hospital was open, but it seemed as if all the air had gone out of the world. One or two of the patients who were thought to be doing well failed again, and sank rapidly on that terrible night. Great revolving fans had been placed in the wards, and were kept in motion continually, but nothing seemed to break the oppression; the very nurses lost heart under it. "Is it the end of the world?" one said, wearily. Thérèse, who had kept up bravely, when morning came was so spent and languid, that she could hardly drag herself across the ward. She flung herself across her little bed, too exhausted to speak to the sister, who shared her turn of rest, and fell into a dead, heavy sleep; when she awoke Sister Sara was standing at the window.

"It has rained!" she cried out, joyfully, hearing Thérèse stir.

Thérèse had not heard the thunder or the heavy drops, but all the air was cool, moist, and exquisitely delicious. Pools of water lay on the leads, the sun just gleamed out from between dark clouds, and birds chirped exultantly.

"Now we can breathe again, the saints be praised!" said the sister, with her little commonplace face made beautiful by thankfulness.

"Poor Sister Annette! Her rain has come at last," said Thérèse, more slowly.

There was a Te Deum at the Cathedral, but grateful hearts did not wait for that to sing their own little special Te Deums. Never had the great plains been so delightful in their eyes as now, when a dense gray pall lay over them, blurring the outlines, creeping up thicker and thicker, dark, watery, heavy masses. The thunder-clouds had come first, great mountainous forms, with white mists floating across them; then followed a few hours of clear, cool, enchanting weather, and afterwards the plains were folded in the thick, close low rain, more beautiful to the people than the most gorgeous coloring could have been. It made itself felt upon the fever at once.

Not many days after, Thérèse was sent for to the little room in the lobby, where Nannon was

allowed to enter. Nannon was there, and M. Deshoulières also. Something in their faces made her ask quickly what was the matter. It was very soon told. Nannon had come from Rue St. Servan, where little Adolphe had the fever, and was crying out piteously for his mademoiselle, his dear Mademoiselle Thérèse.

"Shall you go, mademoiselle?" asked Nannon. M. Deshoulières said nothing, he only looked at her.

"Of course I shall go," answered Thérèse; "that is, if you think I can be spared," she went on, appealing to him.

"That can be arranged," he said, gravely. "But do you understand what you are doing? I fear these people have not treated you well."

"My poor little Adolphe!" was the girl's only answer. She had learned something in these six weeks.

They were obliged to keep her departure a secret from the patients who had been especially under her care. The nurses all kissed her; some of them had tears in their eyes. With all her bravery, she was so young that, when she went away, she clung to Sister Gabrielle and sobbed. "I have been happier here than I ever was in my life before," she said, between her sobs. I do not know whether it was really thus, but looking back she thought so; and M. Deshoulières, who could

not bear to hear her say it, went back to the ward suddenly, so that when she looked round to wish him good-by, he was not there.

"Has that woman no perception, then," Nannon said, indignantly, as they toiled up through the steep streets, "that she will not allow our doctor to come? Monsieur Pinot is not bad, no, he is not bad, but he is like the gosling waddling after the gander. Mademoiselle need not laugh, she knows what I mean. What would you have? Charville could not expect to see two M. Deshoulières."

Nannon had been converted utterly, and like other converts she was not fond of hearing her former opinions quoted.

"After all," she went on, "I am glad mademoiselle is out of that place."

"Is the poor child very ill?"

"I believe so," said the old woman, shrugging her shoulders. "Madame fought against it for days, she said it should not be the fever; she was like a mad woman. But now she is frightened. She loves her children, that wild cat! Ouf, I am out of breath! Such a summer as this does not make one younger."

So they went their way, picking their road over the wet stones, and keeping clear of little torrents of water that here and there spouted out wildly

from the eaves. The flowers were gratefully drinking in the soft rain; a beautiful rich geranium flamed out against a gray stone background; the terrible oppressive cloud was lightened; there were people moving about again; little children playing; one little mite in a pink frock and a tight black cap, Thérèse longed to kiss, but she dared not let them approach her. Presently a girl standing at a door smiled and nodded and kissed both hands. It was Fanchon. The apparition gave Thérèse a little thrill of delight. "It is so odd to think how horribly frightened I was," she said to Nannon, "and now it all seems so natural." She went on with a lightened heart. That little glimpse of Fanchon, and afterwards the ever steadfast loveliness of the Cathedral, did her good. At the door of the Roulleaus' house, Nannon detained her for a moment.

"Listen, mademoiselle," she said. "Do you know last night I dreamed that Monsieur Fabien was come!"

"And so did I," said Thérèse, smiling.

Madame in her linen camisole was at little Adolphe's bedside copying a letter when Thérèse went softly into the room. Was she glad to see her? The girl could not tell. She was rigid and defiant, and yet every now and then an expression resembling terror flashed out from her eyes.

Adolphe was glad at all events. He knew her directly, and put out his poor little weak arms. "Now you will tell me stories, mademoiselle," he said, with a feeble triumph at having carried his own way. Thérèse knew well by this time what to do, and she changed the whole aspect of the uncomfortable little room in a few minutes. Every thing was put in order and ready for use. Poor Adolphe did not really want any stories, but, as he grew a little delirious in the evening, he said over and over again, "il y avait un géant, il y avait un géant." Tears came into her eyes as she heard the little thin voice wandering on. Nothing soothed him so much as to have her close to his bedside, singing to him; and madame, who was very silent, sat and watched them with a fierce, jealous sorrow pulling at her heart. She knew little better than a baby what to do in a sick-room, but she loved her children passionately. It cut her to the heart that Adolphe should turn from her to another. It cut more deeply still that this other should be Mademoiselle Veuillot.

CHAPTER XVI.

"No tear relieved the burden of her heart;
Stunn'd with the heavy woe."

Thalaba.

THE days went on for Thérèse very much as they had done at the hospital. She had but one patient instead of many, it is true, but that one absorbed all her care. Octavie had been sent from the house; the *fille*, who was in the habit of coming for a certain number of hours daily, took fright and kept away. Nannon took her place, but she was not permitted to enter the sick-room, and madame was utterly incapable of those little feminine cares which nursing demands. So it all rested upon Thérèse, and even when the child was unconscious there seemed to be an increase of disquietude if she was not close at hand. She thought it a bad case, and longed for M. Deshoulières' swift perception to be brought to bear upon it, and she could not help remembering Nannon's irreverent simile when little Pinot came into the room, with his little attempt at imitation of the

other's manner. But madame broke out violently when she suggested that M. Deshoulières should be sent for. And so there was nothing for it but to remember his injunctions, and patiently to do what was needed for the poor little man, whose naughtinesses and obstinacies were forgotten now, or recalled only with shame at her own want of forbearance.

She wondered sometimes at madame's strange ways. It was impossible to say in what mood the next hour would find her, fierce or remorseful, snappish or affectionate. Thérèse would have understood better had she known what coals of fire her unconscious hands were heaping and shovelling upon madame's head just then. Nothing could have been so terrible to her as to see this girl whom she had injured sitting with the little hot hand in hers which the mother loved above all others in the world, and longed to tear away out of her clasp. Nothing. It almost maddened her.

At last one morning M. Pinot also told her that he would suggest her sending for M. Deshoulières. "It would be a satisfaction to himself," he said. Thérèse, who knew what those words meant, turned a little pale, and looked tenderly down upon the little ugly brown face, now so pinched and wizened and changed, which kept slipping down from the pillow.

"M. Deshoulières shall not come," answered madame, in her strange defiant tone. "The child is no worse."

"*Pardon*, madame. It grieves me to say —"

"He is not worse, I tell you. The fever must run its course, and I have heard you say it is now only weakness."

"Madame, at this stage —"

"He is not worse, I repeat again. I do not choose that M. Deshoulières should come."

"In that case — Is Monsieur Roulleau aware of the extent of this illness, may I inquire of madame?"

"My husband comes to-day."

"How has she brought him?" thought Thérèse, who knew something of the force of the little notary's fears. She had brought him by not telling him of the illness at all. There was business waiting for him, and she had told him that after it had rained she should demand his return. In her next letter she said that it had rained, that the fever was diminishing, and that on such a day he was to be at Rue St. Servan. That was all. Nannon, who admitted him, wondered as much as any one. Madame come slowly down the stairs and signed to him to enter the little bureau.

"Zénobie, my angel," he said, turning to meet her as she followed him. Something, it might

have been a gray look on her face, arrested him, "What is the matter?" he said, faltering.

She was a woman, after all, — wicked, cruel, but a woman. Her sin was smiting her sorely; there were those terrible coals of fire scorching, consuming her. And he was her husband, the father of her children. "Oh, Ignace, Ignace, *mon ami*," she cried, piteously, stretching out her arms for support, "our little Adolphe!"

"What then?"

"Ah, he suffers so!"

"Suffers! Is he ill?"

"The fever —"

"The fever!" he cried, springing back with one bound against the wall. "The fever is in this house and you let me come?"

She would be patient yet. It was the first shock. He had not realized her words. "He will not know you, Ignace; he is changed and so weak; it is terrible to see him."

"Keep back!" he cried out, for she was drawing closer; "keep back! You have been nursing him, and now you speak to me! Let me go out into the air. Zénobie, how could you be so imprudent?"

"You will not see him — your son?"

"What is the good, what is the good? I can do nothing. See here, what a palpitation you have

given me. Let me pass! I will go back to Tours at once. Let me pass! I shall be a dead man if I stay in the house with a fever."

Her wrath blazed out. "Coward!" she said, standing between him and the door, and holding him immovable with a look of supreme scorn. "Coward! And while you stand there trembling, shaking, do you know who it is who is there by his side, nursing and tending him until I am driven mad? That girl. Do you know that while I hate her, it is all I can do sometimes not to fall on my knees before her and tell her all? Do you know that he cares for her more than for me, — me, his mother?"

"Zénobie, Zénobie, have patience! You will ruin us with your impetuosity."

"Listen, then. You who have not so much as the bravery of a woman in your miserable little heart — it is your child whom that girl is nursing night and day. You have no courage — have you no pity? Do you, remembering who she is, and what she is doing, — do you refuse to let her know that this man, her lover, is alive, — that you could lay your hand upon him, and bring him back to her? Do you refuse that? She may die, remember, die of nursing your child!"

"Not so loud, not so loud," said the little man uneasily. "If she were to die, we should lose the

money, it is true, but it might be the safest. There would be fewer complications."

She turned from him with a look of unutterable horror. In his cowardice, and in his cruelty, he had fallen far below even her measure of wrong-doing. With a pale scared face, he was watching the door with the hope of escape, but she, like an avenging fury, stood between it and him.

"Let us go into the street," he said feebly. "I have always heard there is less danger in the open air. You will not? *N'importe.* Do not let me keep you, my Zénobie. Can I convey any message to your mother?"

She faced him again. "If he dies!".

"He will not die — no, no, he will not die, believe me. You are a little nervous, that is all. Oh, he will not die; he has an excellent constitution — Holy Virgin, what is that!"

It was M. Deshoulières knocking sharply at the door. Madame Roulleau, rigid and defiant again, opened it; the little notary shrank further into the corner; the doctor entered hastily.

"Mademoiselle Thérèse?" he said, looking round. "Ah, madame, may I ask you to request her to descend at once. I bring news, or, believe me, I would not incommode you at such a time."

"What news, monsieur?" asked madame, still erect.

"Monsieur Saint-Martin has arrived."

Her head sank, she went out of the room and up the stairs slowly. There was a tempest in her heart when she opened the door of the sick-room. It was all very solemn and quiet, solemn with the foreshadowing of that quietness which is infinite. The child lay on the little white bed, Thérèse knelt by its side, the *persiennes* were half closed, one quivering ray of sunlight touched the girl's head, the sweet young face was full of tender sorrow. For a moment she stood speechless, watching; the next Thérèse heard a sharp keen voice in her ear:—

"Why do you look like that, you! He is mine, I will not have you take away his love. And I have hated you and done you all the harm I could — do you hear?"

"Hush, hush, madame," said Thérèse softly. She looked at her, and knew that this woman in her strange excitement was speaking truth; at another time she might have been angry at the confession, but for weeks past she had been walking on the borders of that land where wrath and bitterness are hushed. She lifted her hand and pointed to the little face on the pillow. Madame dared not speak, she fell on her knees and trembled. Thérèse gently drew back the *persiennes;* a sweet cool breeze came into the room, the plains were all

steeped in a kind of subdued sunshine, silvery, and broken with clouds. There were long shadows on the roofs and gables, birds singing in the gardens of the Evêché; presently the murmur of a distant chant came swinging up from the Cathedral, where all the windows were open. No service was going on, but the choristers were practising a *requiem*, very sad and sweet, yet now and then breaking into triumphant chorus. Thérèse fancied she caught the words, — "*requiem, dona eis requiem*," shrill, clear, boyish voices answering one another. Rest was very near one of the three in that room. She touched madame, and said, "See, I think he knows us."

Yes. For the last time the dim eyes turned and looked into theirs, — for the last time the little weak hand just moved as if to seek their clasp; the little voice, so strangely pathetic in its hoarse unchildlike accent, tried to reach Thérèse. For the last time. After that there was peace — the peace echoed by the choristers in the Cathedral — the peace that could never any more be broken. So best!

CHAPTER XVII.

"One friend in that path shall be
To secure my steps from wrong;
One to count night day for me,
Patient through the watches long,
Serving most with none to see."

R. BROWNING.

M. DESHOULIÈRES, who had not a moment to spare, paced up and down the bureau in a fever of impatience. M. Roulleau had slipped out directly his wife left the room: the doctor was too preoccupied to notice him at all, or he must have been struck with the terror in his face.

"Does monsieur say that M. Saint-Martin is actually in Charville?" he asked in a trembling voice, with his hand on the door.

"No. He is at Maury. There is barely time to meet the train. Will you hasten mademoiselle?"

And then he began to pace up and down with his watch in his hand. Nobody came. He opened the door, it was all silent. With a sigh — was it relief or disappointment? — he ran down the steps

and hastened to the station. People who passed him said that M. Deshoulières was giving up at last; there was a worn dragged look on his face, like that of a man under the first touch of illness. Poor man! There were two or three conflicting currents in his heart, such as wear lines before they have been running very long. An hour of their work will do more than a few years of age, who is but a slow laborer after all. Fabien was come — this man of whose love he had never known until he had given that away which now he could never more take back. Fabien had come, and there would be a marriage; and Thérèse would be carried away, and he — ? Well, he should remain in Charville, go through that daily round so like, and yet so unlike, itself; worry the Préfet, be victimized by Veuve Angelin — it was not very interesting when he looked at it in this downright, colorless fashion, but still it was there; so far as a future could be foretold, this was the future to which he had to look forward. Most people have once or twice in their lives gone through that desolate time when before them stretches out a gray, cheerless, sunless prospect, a long dusty road, as it were, along which there must be a solitary plodding. Until we have tried it ourselves we cannot believe that, after all, the first view is the saddest part of it; that as we go along we come to

hidden banks, in which starry flowers are blossoming — walls, painted with delicate bright lichen — tiny wayside streams — crystals in the dust — all manner of sweet surprises, and evermore above them all the eternal blue of heaven. Afterwards, when we are in the midst of them, we wonder how the dreary road has become so beautiful; but beforehand it appals us. Perhaps life never looked so sad to Max Deshoulières as in that little journey from Charville to Maury.

When he reached the station the sun was setting. From out of a yellow western sky, a great dusky red gray vapor stretched upwards half across the heavens, and on this again lay purple horizontal bands of cloud. The little town was within a stone's throw of the station; a cluster of cold-looking ugly houses, and on an eminence a church, with a quaint tower running up between its low apse and the nave. M. Deshoulières made straight for the church, skirted it, and found himself in front of a bran-new hotel, having a narrow façade, a little court, and stiff evergreens ranged round in bright green tubs. "M. Saint-Martin? Certainly. Would monsieur have the goodness to pass this way?"

After all, it was rather ludicrous to come in this prosaic fashion upon the man whose absence had given rise to so many speculations. Max smiled

to himself — a little sad smile with an aching heart — as he followed the polite waiter upstairs through a passage, into a room where two gentlemen rose to receive him. One he knew at once — the curé of Ardron. The other — Monsieur Fabien Saint-Martin.

For the first moment I doubt whether he understood much of what was passing; he was looking at Fabien. A young man — for that he was prepared, but somehow it forced itself upon him strangely — tall, slight, with quick, dark eyes, and an expression that did not please him about the mouth and jaw. This was his first, swift impression; his next was that there was a marked restraint and stiffness about the greeting he received. The young man made no attempt to speak, after a ceremonious bow; the curé, who had been writing, resumed his seat at the table. Max said, with a slight flush on his cheek, and with another bow, —

"Permit me to offer you my very sincere congratulations on your return, Monsieur Saint-Martin. It is an event, the delay of which has discomposed us considerably."

Alas, poor Max! How much, only he knew.

"I should have been glad myself to have returned before," said M. Fabien, speaking in an abrupt tone. "*Parbleu*, M. Deshoulières, inheritances do not fall from the skies in such a shower

that this one should be a matter of indifference to me."

"That I can suppose."

"Nevertheless, it appears that I am not greatly indebted to you for your endeavors to make it known," continued the young man, with a disagreeable laugh. "It is well, perhaps, monsieur, that other friends have taken a deeper interest in the matter."

"No one, monsieur, can have had so deep an interest in the matter as myself," said Max, restraining himself; but with a swift flash from his eyes.

M. le Curé, with his very determined opinions on the subject, looking up from his writing at that moment, could not help feeling a disagreeable sense of contrast in the two — M. Deshoulières standing there, erect and massive, with his beautiful head, and his calm, indignant eyes — Fabien pale, angry, restless.

"That I can believe — in one sense," said the young man, sharply.

M. le Curé thought it was time to interfere. "Permit me to offer you a chair," he said, rising and putting forward his own.

"I thank you," answered Max, quietly, "but it appears to me that I shall prefer standing until I can gather the drift of M. Saint-Martin's strange remarks. We will come to the point at once if

you please. Am I to understand that you accuse me of having taken no steps towards informing you of M. Moreau's death and bequest? You are silent, monsieur. I conclude, then, that such is your accusation. Permit me to remark, in reply, that the two only direct means of communication in my power — advertisements and the assistance of the police — were so rigidly forbidden by M. Moreau, that their employment would have deprived you of any benefit whatever under the will, beyond a legacy of 40,000 francs. It was an apparently unaccountable condition — that is to say, it appeared unaccountable to me at the time — but I am under the impression that I mentioned it to M. le Curé at my first interview? At all events it matters little. The will itself can be placed in M. Saint-Martin's hands to-morrow."

He paused. There was an uncomfortable silence. Then the curé said coldly, —

"Certainly; I am aware that you mentioned an extraordinary provision to that effect."

"But," broke in Fabien with a sneer, "I presume the provisions were scarcely extended to the point of obliging M. Deshoulières to ignore any indirect information that might be supplied to him on the subject, or of declining to be enlightened by letters from myself? Possibly I am mistaken. A will that could do so much may have had the

power of enforcing blindness and deafness upon its executor."

Max, stern, quiet, and self-possessed, answered at once, —

"M. Saint-Martin, I demand an explanation, of words which are to me wholly unintelligible."

"M. Deshoulières, I demand, on my part, firstly, an explanation of your non-appearance at the Lion d'Or at Pont-huine?"

"So? that is easily given, monsieur. The sudden illness of one of my patients prevented it. In my stead I sent the notary who drew up Monsieur Moreau's will, and was equally with myself acquainted with its particulars. M. Roulleau spent the afternoon at Pont-huine. As no person appeared, he returned to Charville with the belief that we had been made the victims of a jest."

M. Fabien laughed. "This, I think, you can disprove," he said, turning to the curé.

"It was no jest, monsieur," said the curé, sternly. "You will permit me to remark that all I heard, even from your own lips, of Monsieur Moreau's last illness, and the extraordinary terms of his will, coupled with the amazing fact of his having chosen as *dépositaire* a man wholly unknown to him until the morning of his death, appeared to me so unaccountable, not to say suspicious, that I felt it my duty to act in some degree on my own

responsibility. I made private inquiries among those whom I considered likely to aid me, and immediately that I succeeded in obtaining a slight clew which it appeared to me might lead to the desired point, I thought it desirable — yes, monsieur, I avow it — to test the sincerity of your professions, by appointing a meeting at the Lion d'Or. Permit me to state that from having myself waited there the whole day in vain, I am in a condition to affirm that no notice was taken of my communication."

"Allow me, then, in return, to say that you behaved in an indefensible manner, M. le Curé," replied M. Deshoulières, promptly. "You had no right to indulge in anonymous communications. Nevertheless, I have already informed you of what was done. You can apply to M. Roulleau. Have you any thing more to remark?"

The curé, who was suspicious but not irritable, glancing at him again, could not repress another feeling of admiration. Either the man was a magnificent deceiver or — He was so steadfast, so noble-looking, so immeasurably above the other. M. le Curé fidgeted, and did not know what to think. Fabien answered the question hotly.

"A great deal more. During the last year I have twice written to my uncle, at Château Ardron. What has become of these letters?"

"I cannot answer you," said Max, in some surprise. "I cannot answer you that question. Since the first month only a few unimportant letters have come to me, and they were brought by M. Roulleau, to whom they have been forwarded by some mistake."

"We have questioned old Mathieu at Ardron," the curé said dryly; "he remembers the foreign letters, and will swear to having forwarded them. As to the mistake, he told us that he had your directions to send all letters to M. Roulleau, numero 8, Rue St. Servan, Charville."

M. Deshoulières' face, for the first time, looked troubled. "There is something strange in this which I do not understand," he said slowly. Fabien interrupted him with his insulting laugh.

"There is a great deal, let me assure you, monsieur, which we do not understand —"

Max, in his turn, stopped him. "That will do, Monsieur Saint-Martin. I can pardon much to a person in your position, but my forbearance has its limits. I shall question M. Roulleau on the points you have named. It is unnecessary to say more to-night. May I ask what hour you will appoint for meeting me in Charville to-morrow, when the will can be read, and the papers delivered into your keeping?"

"Charville, monsieur? On my word, were I to

meet you in Charville the complications might be increased by a second death-bed scene. A thousand thanks, but I must decline your invitation to that charming fever-hole."

"In that case, monsieur, I regret to state that my unwished-for trust cannot be brought to an end so quickly as I should desire. The wording of the will requires your presence in Charville."

"More extraordinary provisions!" said the young man, with a shrug of annoyance. The curé interrupted him contemptuously.

"It is not the part of a brave man to fear shadows," he said. "M. Deshoulières, will twelve o'clock be agreeable to you?"

Max bowed.

"At your own house?"

"I think not. I would suggest the Cygne."

"Good. Before you go, may I trouble you with one question?" said the curé, whose suspicions and whose impressions were pulling him different ways.

"Certainly."

"At the beginning of this interview you remarked upon that condition of M. Moreau's will which forbade the advertisement of the bequest to his nephew, that it appeared unaccountable to you at the time. I gather from that, monsieur, that a solution has since presented itself to you. If I am

not mistaken, may I inquire the nature of this solution?"

Ah, Thérèse, waiting and watching, not knowing yet who was so near! Ah, faithful heart, that never faltered in its purpose, nor suffered its own pain to stand before her happiness! Ah, true, patient, noble love, that gave his face the glory that it wore!

"Monsieur Saint-Martin," he said, turning from the curé, and speaking to the young man, "I believe that your uncle, in spite of his words, loved you above all others. I believe he regretted the harshness which had separated you and Mademoiselle Veuillot, and desired in a certain manner to atone for it. He may have thought that a voluntary appeal on your part would be a test of the sincerity of your attachment. At all events, it appears to me that the provisions of his will, which were intended to keep Mademoiselle Veuillot in Charville, and to oblige you to receive your inheritance in the same town, could tend to no other purpose."

"Ah, by the way, Thérèse!" said Fabien, lightly. "Is Thérèse in Charville?"

"You will see her to-morrow," M. Deshoulières said gravely. Was this the first thought of her who had been left so desolate? He bowed and went away quickly, not daring to trust himself

longer. Fabien half followed him, and then came back and flung himself on a sofa.

"I don't know that we should have let him go, after all," he said, irresolutely.

"I hardly think you would have had much power to prevent him," remarked the curé, with a grim smile, coming from the window, and ringing the bell for lights. He could not help despising the young man with his weak passionate nature, and yet he tried to keep up a conviction that he had been wronged.

"And so Thérèse is here," said Fabien. He laughed a little to himself, and curled his moustache. "She had a spirit, had Thérèse, and her eyes were something to remember. *Parbleu*, though, a visit to that fever-hole is not too agreeable to contemplate."

"Is Mademoiselle Veuillot your *fiancée?*" asked the curé, severely.

Fabien laughed again. "*Fiancée?* No, *mon père*, not altogether. We shall see."

"It is possible that her interests also may have suffered."

"Ah — yes — it is possible. But my uncle had not too great a love for Thérèse. I am curious to know how he has provided for her."

"Yet I have understood that your disagreement with your uncle originated in your attachment for

Mademoiselle Veuillot," said the curé, facing round upon him sharply.

"Precisely," answered Fabien, airily. "But then — what will you? — I was young, foolish — the truth was that I could not endure my old uncle's *régime* in the office. I heard of an opening in Rio Janeiro, and I worked my way out. On the voyage I wished myself back a hundred times, I promise you, but once there, somehow or other, I found myself on my feet — fortune favored me. I was getting weary of it, though, and this news came to me just in time through M. l'Abbé, but it is not a bad place after all. One sees the world."

And so M. Fabien rattled on, while the curé looked at him and listened with a growing discontent. Before he went to bed, he found it necessary to repeat to himself all the evidence he had gathered against M. Deshoulières. There was no denying it; things bore a very dark appearance. A suspicious trust; an appointment said to have been kept in the face of his own knowledge to the contrary; letters suppressed; rumors that all was not right; a letter from M. l'Abbé at the Evêché: "M. Deshoulières is a man well spoken of, but my own opinion of him does not coincide with that of the world." A letter from the Préfet: "I consider this doctor a pestilent, discontented individual,

always trying to advance his own schemes. In effect, I doubt him."

"M. le Préfet would not have spoken without reason," said M. le Curé to himself assuringly, as he folded up the letter. "After all, there are cases in the world when a man's face does not agree with his actions."

M. Deshoulières went sadly home that night. It was not of his own gray future that he was thinking, nor of the accusations that had been heaped upon him so unexpectedly — he almost smiled as he recalled them. He was thinking of Thérèse and of Fabien. Was this man to whom her heart had gone out, one who would keep it, and treasure it, and cherish it? There was a deep intolerable pain in the question that would come surging up in spite of his efforts to still it. The stars shone out, and a fresh rustling breeze was swaying the stiff sycamores, lights were gleaming from the old houses, the vines on the balconies had changed into dusky masses. The shadowy old sounds and sights were very familiar and sweet to poor Max, but this night they seemed to have lost their power.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"Aimer sans Amour est amer."

THÉRÈSE was waiting for M. Deshoulières the next morning when he went to Rue St. Servan. He could not tell how she looked; she was eager, troubled, doubtful, all at once. He did not yet know what had happened, but he guessed directly. "Ah, that poor madame!" she said shuddering. "It is too terrible—" and then she stopped.

He saw that she had been overwrought. All that night Madame Roulleau had lain on the floor by the child's bed, in a fierce agony of despair, not weeping, but writhing. Once she had looked up with dry, burning eyes, and said to Thérèse hoarsely, "Your lover is come. Do you remember? *he* told you so once, and I beat him for it. Do you hear that, all of you? I told a lie, and I beat my little Adolphe." There was something so terrible in her voice and in her face, that Thérèse and Nannon shrank. And this was all that she knew of Fabien.

The poor child, in spite of her bravery, could hardly endure these different emotions that were tearing at her heart. Nothing at the hospital had been so dreadful to witness as the sight of that hard, insupportable agony. And in the midst of it she had been told that Fabien was come.

"What is it all?" she said, putting out her hand to Max, with an appealing glance that went to his heart. He answered it at once with a kind smile.

"There is good news for you. M. Saint-Martin has come at last."

"So it is true!" Her face changed suddenly, her eyes danced. "I could not believe it; but if you say so, I know it is true."

Yes, those grave blue eyes were true as truth itself. There was a burden to be borne by one, perhaps by both of them, and his work should be to lighten hers.

"You may believe it, indeed. I have seen him—"

"Seen him!" Such gladness in her face!—such gladness in her voice!

"And you shall meet him to-day at the Cygne."

Something made her put out her hand to him again. "What do I not owe you!" she said, gratefully.

"For what?" he said with a smile. "I was

neither the letter nor the ship that brought him back. *Allons*, it appears to me it is monsieur the curé of Ardron whom you will have to thank the most."

She shook her head without answering. She was not deceived. If ever friend was faithful to his friendship, it was this friend. Neither of them spoke for a moment, then Thérèse said slowly, —

"I shall understand every thing better by and by, I think. I fancy there are things which neither of us understand as yet. That poor woman! —" she added, sighing.

"So the poor little one is dead!"

"It is not that only — I mean that is not the worst," she said in answer to his look. "Her sorrow is so dreadful to see. I have asked her to hear Père Gaspard, but she will not let him come into the room. I wonder whether Sister Gabrielle could do any thing! I wonder what it is! She says such terrible things."

M. Deshoulières was too generous-hearted to suspect readily, but that night he had been perplexed by thoughts of little Roulleau, suggested in the interview at Maury.

"I must see her husband," he said. "Is he with her, or shall I find him in the bureau?"

"Did you not know?" asked Thérèse in surprise. "He is not here. He went away again at

once when he heard of the fever. The little coward!"

"Went away!"

"But yes, indeed. To Tours, she supposes. I think that is one of the things that has half killed her."

M. Deshoulières' face became more grave. This flight of the little notary added considerably to the difficulties of his position. He remembered also that Ignace had heard his tidings of M. Saint-Martin's arrival. Thérèse, who saw this cloud, asked at once, "What is it?"

"I do not like his absence at this time, and I want the papers connected with M. Moreau's will. Will you wait here for a moment while I speak to the clerk?"

He came back again presently, shaking his head. "We can go no further than the outside of the chest; Madame Roulleau has the keys, and I am afraid you must make an effort to get them. It is really a matter of extreme importance, or I would not ask you to undertake such a task," he added abruptly.

Thérèse turned a little pale. "Does it not seem cruel?"

"I cannot help it. It is necessary. Would you rather that I saw her?"

"No, no. I will try, but I dread it."

She was absent so long that he had risen to follow her, when she came into the room again, white and trembling. "No, I have done nothing," she said, in answer to his look. "She only rocks herself backwards and forwards on the ground. She never looked up — I do not know whether she heard me; but yet she must have, for when I came away at last, I heard her spring up and bolt the door. Nannon is out, and there she is quite alone. It cannot matter so greatly. Fabien can wait for his papers another day — " A shade that unconsciously crossed his face made her cry out quickly, "They will trust you unreservedly!"

"Scarcely that, perhaps," he said, with a smile and a sigh. "Well, we must wait; this fit may possibly pass off. I will go and ask Sister Gabrielle to come here. Whether that poor woman will see her or not, she will be some one in the house, for you must take Nannon with you to the Cygne soon after twelve. You understand that it is on account of the fever that I do not bring M. Saint-Martin here?"

"Yes, yes. But ought I to see him? You are sure there is no danger?" she asked piteously.

"Not with the usual precautions. Can I help you in any way?"

"No, thank you. Père Gaspard has been very kind."

Thérèse never knew how those hours passed. She tried to go into the room where madame lay in her awful depth of despair, but the door was locked, and Thérèse, who could not keep down the well of joy that seemed to come dancing up from her heart, felt indeed as if this happiness separated them more than any bolts. She called herself cruel, inhuman; she thought of little Adolphe, the weariness, the fever, the pain; but even while her tears fell, those glad visions would intrude themselves. When we are quite young we are so rigorous over our sorrows that we are impatient of comfort; it is in after life that we learn to refuse no consolations. She scolded herself, and then when Sister Gabrielle came, fell into her arms, and laughed and cried together. Sister Gabrielle, who had a way of soothing people, listened quietly, and seemed to lift that little burden of self-reproach from her heart. She dressed her, and called Nannon, and stood on the top of the steps watching the two go away together down the street, and under the dark archway. Charville had broken out into its cheerfulness again; the fever was dying away, only here and there was still the sharp anguish of recent loss like Madame Roulleau's. Thérèse went off with a buoyant step into the sunshine, and the merry jangle of voices. Sister Gabrielle turned back into the house, took her

knitting, and sat patiently on the stairs outside the room, where the mother had shut herself in with her despair.

When Thérèse reached the Cygne, something of her brightness had fled. She hung back with a little dread; it was Nannon who pushed forward, and made Toinette show them the room which M. Deshoulières had set apart for them.

"There is no one there; see, mademoiselle!" she said, reconnoitring.

It had a balcony, which looked over the sycamore-trees at the lovely spires of the Cathedral. Nannon, with quick tact, went out there, and sat humming a little chanson, very cracked and discordant, but to her full of memories of her girlhood. Those songs of old age are the most pathetic songs of all. Thérèse in the room waited with a hundred hopes and fears in her heart. It was three years since she had seen Fabien, and now that he was near she began to tremble.

Meanwhile, in another room of the hotel, a stormy discussion was taking place. It was necessary for M. Deshoulières to greet the two gentlemen with the information that the notary had left Charville unexpectedly, and that it was not in his power to produce the will. M. Saint-Martin broke out in passionate terms at once.

"So, monsieur, and this is the end! Do not

suppose that I have come here to be trifled with."

"M. Deshoulières must be aware," interrupted the curé in his frigid tones, "that he stands in a strange position."

"M. le Curé, I am perfectly aware. M. Saint-Martin has — not a right, but a certain amount of excuse for what would otherwise be unpardonable expressions. But when I have said this, I have said all. Events have conspired to bring about this false position, and a very short time will, I suppose, set it right. Meanwhile, I claim the courtesy and the trust which is due from one gentleman to another."

"From one gentleman! — yes," sneered Fabien.

"*Pardon*, monsieur; I was not aware that you considered yourself beyond that pale."

Fabien, who was white with rage, would have answered fiercely, but the curé again interfered.

"Messieurs, the interests of both require something more than a battle of words."

"You are right," said Max, turning frankly towards him. "I regret what I said. The delay is just as vexatious to me as to you — more so, in fact, since it seems to create suspicions which are certainly not agreeable for me to hear — but we had better meet it like reasonable beings. It is possible that I can obtain the keys from Madame

Roulleau to-morrow — at all events learn where her husband is, and telegraph for him at once. If you return to Maury, I will give you the earliest information; if, on the contrary, you prefer to remain in Charville, you will have the satisfaction of being on the spot, and able to adopt whatever measures you think advisable — for the security of your inheritance," added the doctor, with a little mockery in his smile, which was not lost upon the curé.

Monsieur Saint-Martin, not having recovered himself, answered sharply: "Certainly I do not choose to remain in this city of the plague. My lawyer will be here to-day; and as to further proceedings, I shall be guided by him. He may suggest immediate action."

"I should recommend your carrying it out at once," replied M. Deshoulières gravely. Fabien, who hated ridicule, looked quickly at him to see whether he was serious or not, and could not satisfy himself.

"It is unendurable," he muttered. "After having all one's life been pestered by the vagaries of an old man, he might at least have spared his ridiculous restraints when he was dead, and could find no pleasure in them."

"Is Mademoiselle Veuillot here?" asked the curé, looking up.

"She is. She is in the next room."

"What do you propose to do?" said Fabien, disregarding.

"I have already told you, monsieur. Meanwhile you may employ any spurs with which your lawyer may furnish you," replied M. Deshoulières impatiently. Thérèse was in the next room, and this man was indifferent.

"You ought to see Mademoiselle Veuillot at once," said the curé, rising.

"Thérèse? Oh, yes. She is here, you say? By all means."

She heard their voices in the passage; half rose, and sat down again, while the color faded completely out of her face. In the balcony, Nannon was singing her little refrain,—

"Hélas, je sais un chant d'amour
Triste ou gai tour à tour:"

an old melancholy Breton song that had somehow been wafted across from the quaint wild province of hills and chestnut-trees to these broad unromantic corn plains. Thérèse, who had not heard it before, never forgot the little sad air. She heard the song, and the voices, and the door opening; but for the first moment it was all confused. It was her own name which recalled her; her own name in Fabien's voice.

"Ah, Thérèse, at last we meet! Believe me that I am enchanted to renew our acquaintance. You have not quite forgotten me, I flatter myself."

She raised her eyes, not to his but to Monsieur Deshoulières'. One piteous, appealing glance — what was this? — acquaintance — forgotten? Three years of hungering and hoping, and could this be her greeting at the end? He with an overwhelming pity in his heart might not help her by look, or sign, or word. Face to face, heart to heart, these two must show each other the story of their lives.

"You have come at last, Fabien," she said, faintly.

"After all, yes. I have had enough of South America, as you may imagine. It was a little more amusing than the old bureau at Rouen, but it was becoming *ennuyant.* Variety before all. Life requires to be tasted like wine, a sip here and a sip there before one decides. Now I shall try the charms of Paris. And you? have you remained here since my uncle's death? A *triste* place, is it not?"

And she had loved him! By some subtile force of sympathy, Max knew that she was suffering a sharper pang than any which had come to him. He was standing with the curé where they could not see them, but he could hear the light frivolous voice,

the heartless words. He had loved in vain, but she had loved unworthily. There is no sting so sharp as that sting. And outside, in the sunny balcony, old Nannon was crooning over her refrain —

> "Hélas, je sais un chant d'amour,
> Triste ou gai tour à tour :
> Ce chant qui de mon cœur s'élève,
> D'où vient qu'en pleurant je l'achève ?"

Thérèse was very pale, but she had got back her self-possession.

"I am sure that poor M. Moreau felt your departure."

"Did he? Ah, that is not improbable! He should have conducted himself differently, and prevailed on me to stay. However, I pardon him; he did his best to atone for it by dying at the right moment. Not but what I owe him something for his conduct even then."

"Oh, Fabien!"

"It is true, then," he said excitedly. "And M. Deshoulières is aware of my sentiments."

Max turned round grave and quiet.

"It is unnecessary to repeat them in the presence of Mademoiselle Veuillot."

"*Parbleu*, and why? They will be repeated before the world very shortly, let me assure you, if the will and certain explanations do not reach me."

She looked inquiringly — again not at him, but at M. Deshoulières. This time he answered her:

"Monsieur Roulleau's absence has placed us in a difficulty. Until his return M. Saint-Martin has only my word to rely upon.",

"A word which, unfortunately, is contradicted by facts."

Whether he was provoked by M. Deshoulières' calmness, or irritated by his disappointment, his tone was more insulting than it had been the preceding night. The girl's eyes flashed.

"Are you doubting his word?"

"There is scarcely room for *doubt*," said Fabien, meaningly.

With a swift impetuous impulse she crossed to where Max stood, —

"How can you let them say such things?" she said, passionately, her breathing short and quick. Poor Thérèse! she felt all a woman's indignation and a woman's powerlessness at once. "M. le Curé," she cried, "how can you listen and not speak?" I think she dumfounded them all for a minute. Nannon, who heard her voice, stopped her chanson to listen. Max, with a strange sweet pain in his heart, looked down at her and cared very little for Fabien's rude speeches. After all, she was not powerless. Max looked at her and said, softly, —

"Such things do not hurt me."

And at that moment there was a heavy step, a little fumbling at the door, and Madame Roulleau came in. Her face was so white and rigid that Fabien, who did not know her, exclaimed as if she were an apparition, and, indeed, the others were scarcely less startled. She came across the room, like a person walking in a dream, straight to where M. Deshoulières stood, and flung a key on the table before him.

"There is what you want," she said. "If I touch the papers they will scorch me."

They all looked at one another. Thérèse, who was still trembling with excitement, put her hand on her arm. Madame Roulleau threw it off, keeping her eyes fixed on M. Deshoulières.

"Do you wish to know why I have come?" she went on. "*Tenez*, you can hear, then, all of you. My little Adolphe is dead — dead, do you understand? — dead of the fever; and my husband, who was frightened, has left him and me by ourselves. That is what husbands should do, is it not?" She spoke like a person in an agony; Thérèse shuddered. "Some one said M. Saint-Martin was here — it was either that sister or Adolphe, I do not know which. I can tell you all about it. We will begin from the beginning — that was at Ardron. M. Deshoulières, as you know, and my husband

brought me home the letters which he found, — two letters from Rio Janeiro asking for money. I burned them. Burning is always safe. Two others came afterwards, and those I burned also. We wrote those answers that we had from Paris. Is that all? No, I remember. There was that appointment at Pont-huine, when you sent Ignace, but it was easy enough for him to stay away."

"Unhappy woman," said the curé, sternly, "what led you into all this wickedness?"

She did not answer him. She had her eyes still fixed upon M. Deshoulières, and she never looked aside.

"Ask her," said the curé.

"Why was this, Madame Roulleau?" said the doctor, sadly.

"We wanted the money," she answered at once; "the money you gave us for the girl. And what Ignace had to do about it brought in money. We knew it must all go again when M. Saint-Martin came home. Last night I said to myself that I would tell you; I do not know why I came here; the sister said something, I believe. She is staying with him." And then, with a bitter cry which they never forgot, "He is dead — dead! I dared not send for you, and you might have saved him."

She went swiftly out of the room, down the stairs, into the street. If they had wished to stop

her they could scarcely have done so; but they all stood dumb, that last cry ringing in their ears.

"*Libera nos a malo*," said the curé, at last, under his breath. "*Amen*."

He was a just man. Perhaps his prayer had not only to do with that poor stricken woman who had gone out from them. Perhaps he was thinking also of the evil of suspicions and accusations without cause. He was a just man, but ungracious. He wanted to speak at once to M. Deshoulières, and the words would not come readily. Thérèse was looking shyly and beseechingly at Fabien. Why did he not acknowledge the unconscious wrong that he had done? Nobody spoke. It was Nannon who broke the silence, coming in from the balcony.

"The saints preserve us! She has gone down the street as if there were a mob at her heels."

"I may as well go and search for the will, I believe," said M. Deshoulières, turning round with a sigh. Thérèse still looked at Fabien. Why did he not speak?

"M. Saint-Martin," said the curé, gravely, "I think there is a duty for us to perform before we can allow M. Deshoulières to leave us — a duty and a reparation. My own share in the matter has been the heaviest. I beg to offer him my most sincere apologies."

"It may or may not be, as this woman says," Fabien answered grudgingly; "it does not explain it altogether to my mind. At all events it is impossible to congratulate M. Deshoulières upon his choice of a notary. I shall make a point of having the rascal punished, and meanwhile may I request you, monsieur, to do us the favor to fetch the will without delay? The sooner one gets out of this hole the better."

"Allow me to repudiate M. St. Martin's sentiments altogether," said the curé, with a flush on his sallow cheek. "I beg to decline having any thing to do with the reading of the papers connected with this — what I may call — unfortunate will. It had better be delayed until the arrival of the lawyer."

"You desert me, in fact, Monsieur le Cure," said Fabien, crossly.

"I leave you in good hands, as you must be aware," said the curé, who, having been mistaken himself, felt a degree of satisfaction in snubbing the young man. "Nothing that I can say can atone for the pain we have unintentionally inflicted upon M. Deshoulières, and all that remains is a matter of form."

"Will you not consent to meet us here to-morrow at the same time?"

"On the contrary, immediately that I have been

to the Evêché, I shall return to Ardron. Are you coming my way, M. Deshoulières?"

They all went down the stairs together — the curé, the doctor, Fabien looking discontented, Thérèse, and Nannon. Thérèse lingered a moment to say in an undertone,

"Fabien, why do you not acknowledge that you have wronged him!"

"Wronged him, bah! The only person wronged is myself. Thérèse, you used to take my part."

It was the first allusion, on his part, to other days. A little earlier in the interview it would have touched her more. Now it gave her something of the old sense of compassion for his weakness; but that was not the feeling that could bring her back. Her heart had always revolted against injustice; it revolted now doubly, trebly. She was frightened at herself; frightened at the way in which the love she had been clinging to all this time was melting away. In the midst of her pain and indignation and pity, it gave her a strange unreal feeling. There is often a strange medley in our hearts on those days which we call crises in our lives. The lesser things subside, and we forget all but the most prominent; but at the time the oddest emotions hustle one another. Thérèse was puzzled at herself; at the change that seemed to have come over her since that morning. And

then she found herself curiously watching the little procession that went down the stairs, — the curé in his flowing black cassock and his wide beaver hat; M. Deshoulières and Fabien, so unlike each other; Nannon, with her broad shoulders and her heavily plaited green gown — it seemed as if all the characters in her little drama were trooping down together. Monsieur Deshoulières was the victor, who was going away in triumph, but there was not much triumph in his heart just then. At the door they separated.

"Adieu, Thérèse," said Fabien, with his hand on the door of the *salle-à-manger*.

"Adieu, Fabien."

"If you come to Paris at any time let me know. Do not allow the provinces to engross you altogether. Or if you have need of any thing — "

"I have need of nothing."

"In that case, *au revoir*."

He wanted to punish her. His nature was too small to bear the humiliation of allowing himself to be in the wrong. He was in a rage with them all, and he wanted to punish her. He only stung her. And the others had passed out, so that they heard nothing.

CHAPTER XIX.

"And thou, as one that once declined,
When he was little more than boy,
On some unworthy heart with joy,
But lives to wed an equal mind."
In Memoriam.

MONSIEUR le Curé had his own little mortifications to endure before he got back to his study in the presbytère at Ardron. On his way to the Evêché he encountered the Préfet, who loved a little gossip, and stopped him at once.

"Is it true? Has Monsieur Moreau's heir actually arrived?"

"Yes, Monsieur le Préfet," said the curé, grimly. "I came to Charville with him for the pupose of ascertaining the meaning of certain suspicious circumstances connected with the will and the trusteeship."

"What, those ridiculous reports about M. Deshoulières?"

"Ridiculous! I have your own letter confirming them."

"Mine! My dear Monsieur le Curé, I must

have been a great fool, if I wrote any thing so absurd. Ah, bah! I remember. I was irritated with him at one time, I believe — he had a mania, and worried me. But — M. Deshoulières! He is a hero, nothing less. There is to be a meeting to-morrow, to discuss some means of making known to him the gratitude of the town."

At the Evêché it was the same. The Abbé laughed in his face. "He nettled me once, I acknowledge, but that was a trifle. I cannot tell you my feelings towards him now. Ask any of the clergy who worked with him in this last terrible three months. A mistake? — of course it was a mistake. All France has cause to be proud of M. Deshoulières. My dear friend, imagine your coming on such an errand!"

"Monsieur l'Abbé," said the curé, sharply, "I only wish you people of Charville would appreciate your heroes a little beforehand."

Poor Thérèse! That day was, probably, the most desolate in her life. Whichever way she looked every thing seemed blank and homeless. Something had gone away out of her heart; at first a great swelling indignation took its place; but this could not last. There are sudden deaths as well as lingering: her love had met with such an end; but all deaths must have their suffering. Almost his first words had done it. What was it

in them? how was he different from the Fabien of old days? She sat by her window looking out over the gabled roofs at the plain and the far horizon, where sad-colored clouds were creeping quietly up — with eager eyes that seemed to be searching an answer for the questions that were perplexing her. She was very miserable and sick at heart, but it was not so much with the loss of Fabien, as with the loss of love. It seemed to her as if, in spite of the slighting and the coldness, she ought to love him still — and she did not. It was the identical Fabien after all, though she tried to think otherwise. In the old contests with his uncle, the old impatience of control, weak resistance, attempts at self-assertion, there had been the same character, but she had set round it a little glow of her own, and covered up its imperfections until she had forgotten them. She had counted for love what was no more than a mixture of vanity and self-will. Old Moreau might have left Fabien alone in this matter, and he would have ended by marrying a *dot*. Or, again, a little hardship and real work would have quickly brought him back from South America. But the old man yearned after his prodigal. He smoothed his way for him, all the time writing fierce unforgiving letters demanding submission and return. Fabien, who soon found out where his good things came from,

used to enjoy them comfortably, and mock at the threats which they contradicted. When at last they stopped he was a little uneasy, and wrote two letters; but he was receiving a good salary in an office, and there was no great difficulty in being supplied with money. M. Moreau's feelings were pretty well known in Rio. It seems sometimes in this world as if those unloving natures that shut their hearts against the sunshine around them are suffered to pour out all that they can give where they meet with no return. Perhaps that loving without response is at once their punishment and their blessing. Where all to us looks hard and barren rock, there is at least one little stream of water trickling down into the desert with unselfish bounty.

Fabien was the same — except that his faults and his weakness had in those three years become more prominent — but Thérèse missed the key to her puzzle, herself. It was she who had changed, while all the time she believed it to be Fabien. She had grown up with disadvantages of education like his own, but the nobler nature recognized a higher standard when it was given, and strained towards it. There was the difference. With all her faults and her visions of self-pleasing, she had not the vain satisfied contentment which sees nothing better nor more desirable than itself. She was

always, almost unconsciously, wanting something beyond, and that desire is never ungratified. At a time when things seemed saddest, and all about her most mean and petty and discouraging, she was shown a glimpse of the most perfect thing this earth ever has to show — the heart of a good man. There was this in Thérèse — she recognized at once its goodness and its beauty, it showed her what somehow she had failed to see before. All work is not achieved by the same instruments, though we sometimes speak as if it were. Only it is God's work always. And I think that after Thérèse knew Max Deshoulières — knew him as she did in a hundred more ways than there has been space to tell you about here — she unconsciously transferred his qualities to Fabien, his generosity, and patience, and manliness, and truth, and tenderness, so that she used to dream of Fabien with all these making him beautiful. As she rose herself, she could not but also raise that one who held so dear a portion of her heart. Absence softened down the little remembrances which might have interfered with her dreams. And then came the awakening — the awakening, and, alas! the contrast. It is not when we first see what is lovely that we appreciate it most. It is when we come back to our former ideal. All the glory of mountains, and the vastness of their

snow-fields, and the tender radiance of their sunsets, do not fill us with their beauty perfectly until we return and know for the first time how far they excel the things to which our eye had become accustomed — our common hills. It hurts our loyalty sometimes to acknowledge it, but we cannot help it — nay, we need not try to help it. The best is to be the best always.

But if you have ever felt this, you will know something of the feeling which was causing bitter pain to poor Thérèse, as she sat on the ground in her room, with her head on the window-sill, and her eyes filling with hot tears of shame. She had believed love to be eternal, and lo! it had died away out of her heart. She scarcely thought of his own coldness, of the studied way in which he had avoided any expression which should lead her to fancy they met on terms in any way resembling those in which they had parted. If his words had been like fire, she knew her feelings would not have been different — there, as I have said, was the sting. So ungenerous, so passionate, so weak! And yet she blamed herself for letting her love go. She was very young. She wanted some wise, tender heart on which to rest her head and so pour out her perplexities. But she had no one. Nannon, who had heard enough to make her furious, did not know what to say or what to think about

it; she had sense enough to hold her tongue; at the same time it made a sort of restraint of which they were both conscious. Sister Gabrielle could not come to Thérèse; she was ministering to a more terrible grief in a sadder room. If she had come, I doubt whether the girl would not have been too shy to tell her pathetic little story. And so she sat there and let her eyes rest on the soft clouds and the Cathedral that carried upwards towards them its burden of earth voices, anguish, and joy; and wondered vaguely what was to come of it all, and whether she was to be left like a little waif and stray in this hard forgetful world. Pity her a little — my poor Thérèse! It was hard for her. She was solitary and young, with no one on whom to lavish innocent girlish caresses, no one to pet or to scold or to cherish her. Even the sweet joy of helpfulness, which had taken the bitterness out of her solitude, could not quite heal the pang.

M. Deshoulières did not come near her all that day. He, too, was suffering. A hundred hopes and fears and doubts gave him no peace. He cared not a *sou* for this retractation, which to the curé seemed such a mighty matter; but his wrath blazed out against Fabien when he thought of Thérèse. He dared not go to her. If he had known of what her heart was full, he would have acted otherwise, but he felt as if, poor child, it would be an intru-

sion upon her humiliation. Her love had died; he thought of it as still struggling, hoping, clinging. They were not his own wrongs, but hers, which made him so stern and abrupt in his interview with Fabien and his lawyer on the following day.

No news came of the little notary. After Madame Roulleau's confession, however, there could be no difficulty about the will. But there was a clause which the lawyer read slowly, and to which M. Deshoulières, who knew what was coming, listened with knitted brows. A clause which bequeathed a small sum for the maintenance of Mademoiselle Thérèse Veuillot while she remained in Charville, "or until she be otherwise provided for by Monsieur Fabien Saint-Martin."

M. Laurent paused. Fabien said, with a little laugh, —

"Ah! I remember. I used to have a *tendresse* for the *belle Thérèse.* I suppose my uncle thought it might come to something. The sum is not much; it may as well be continued. *Allons*, M. Laurent, pass on."

To tell the truth, he had begun to be afraid of M. Deshoulières; but he had never so much cause to be afraid as at that moment. Nevertheless Max, still thinking of her, put a strong restraint upon himself, since that secret of hers must be sacred from all the world. He went slowly away

from the Cygne when all his disagreeable work there was at an end. A train was nearly due, and the country people were flocking down to the station with empty baskets, and a merry confusion of shrill voices. It was pretty generally known what the meeting was arranging that day: he was not thinking about it when he found himself in the midst of a little hubbub of congratulations and smiling faces. It was so spontaneous that he was greatly touched; he broke away as soon as he could, but the warm homely blessings pursued him. Just as he reached the Cathedral, he saw Thérèse and Nannon going in. He followed her; she did not see him, but they were kneeling near one another, the vast length of the Cathedral stretched before them, with rich deep shadows. All the light came through gorgeous panes of sapphire, ruby, orange: it was indescribably beautiful and solemn. As she carried back her chair she saw him, and they went out together. The old women sitting in the porch and selling *brioche* cakes, all knew of what was going on at the Préfecture, and stopped their knitting to nod and smile. Max, who only thought of Thérèse, looked at her sad face with an infinite pity in his heart.

"Where are you going?" he asked.

"I do not know," she said, wearily. "The funeral has been to-day, and poor madame cannot

bear to see me. I came out because I thought she wished me away."

"If mademoiselle stays in that miserable house she will die," said Nannon, bluntly.

"Come this way," he said.

He led her down through the little narrow street to the Place where his own house was. Except a few *bonnes* with their charges, the little space under the trees was deserted. They sat down together on one of the green seats, and Nannon chatted with a little fat girl and her nurse, who were solemnly throwing a ball backward and forward with profound interest in their faces. Max was not quite clear how to begin, when Thérèse forestalled him.

"I cannot bear to think of what you have endured for us," she said gently. "You have been so kind a friend, and this must seem like such terrible ingratitude! I could not understand it all — so much has come at the same time" — she said, with a little trembling hesitation in her voice which made him long to break out into passionate pleading. But he answered her very quietly.

"You need not think about it any more. Such a mistake could only be troublesome for a day or two. And when M. Moreau made his will, his choice of me as a trustee was sufficiently unaccountable to set tongues wagging. The very fact

of my being his medical attendant then prevented any possibility of my benefiting under his will, as we all knew; but I suppose there are always people who think that money sticks in the fingering."

She shook her head. "Fabien should not have believed it."

"But remember," he said, more eagerly than he might have done if it had not been his rival whom he was defending — "there were quite enough odd circumstances to make him suspicious. I ought not to have left matters as I did in Roulleau's hands. You should recollect this. M. Saint-Martin had actual ground for his suspicions."

Thérèse paused for a moment before she answered.

"It was afterwards — when he knew they were false."

"It is hard to shake off impressions."

What could he say? His heart was torn in a hundred ways. He longed to help her — he feared to hurt her. When he looked at her sad face, all the anger in his nature leaped up against Fabien, and yet the very strength of his feelings made him fear to be ungenerous. Was it, indeed, all over between them? "About yourself?" he went on at last.

"Ah, yes, about myself. Your troubles are not at an end, you see," she said, with a little quiver-

ing attempt at playfulness. "Am I to go on living with Madame Roulleau?"

"I am afraid it will not do for you at all. I do not like your being there even now."

"But I am not so sure. I have been thinking about it a great deal. At first I remembered that she used to say I was an expense; but yesterday, do you recollect, she said that the money they had from me was what they wanted? If I went away, do you think she would be poorer? or is it too little to help them?"

"I am sure it helps them," said M. Deshoulières, hesitating slightly.

"And yet it seems to be very little. How much did my uncle leave me exactly?"

"A thousand francs a year," he said, still reluctantly.

"And that is all they have had? Ah, no, I perceive. Oh, what have you been doing!" she cried, her eyes filling with tears.

He turned away from them almost abruptly. "Bah!" he said. "Of course a *dépositaire* has to see to such little things. That is nothing. You should rather blame me for the bad choice I made. I will tell you what strikes me. There is a Madame Aubert here, an excellent woman, whose husband has but lately died, and whose daughter is delicate and wants a companion of her

own age. I think you might be very happy there, provided" — his voice trembled — "provided you desire to remain in Charville?"

"Where could I go?" she said, with heavy tears dropping from her eyes. "I wonder whether in all France there is any one so friendless as I am." It was spoken under her breath, but he caught the forlorn words.

"Thérèse!" he said passionately. "Thérèse! —"

She half rose from the seat, turning on him a frightened face. He stopped her.

"Hear me at least," he said. "I ask nothing — nothing: I would not pain you, no, not for all the joy which a word of yours might bring. I have not forgotten what you told me, — if you repeat it now, my Thérèse, I swear your love shall be to me as sacred a thing as it has been since I heard it from your lips. If it is so, I will say only, forgive me, and trust me once more. But, if things are not as they were — if — if —," his great frame shook with emotion, he put out his hands, his voice was choked. Then he recovered himself with a strong effort. "Thérèse, is there any hope?"

She was silent. What was this rush of tenderness which swept across her heart? What was this great contentment which seemed suddenly to calm all the sadness and the wounds and the self-

reproach of the past days? Could it be new, this feeling which seemed to fill her whole being with a sense of unutterable happiness? Ah, no, more likely all this time it had been growing in her unawares. More likely, as has been said before, she had taken his goodness, and his nobility, and his tenderness, and had set them up in her heart, and called the image Fabien. She had done it in good faith, all unconsciously, only she had been treasuring a shadow; and, lo! there came a waft, and the shadow was gone. It may have been strange that the awakening had not come before; nevertheless it had not. She had been faithful to Fabien, but it was to Fabien drest in M. Deshoulières' virtues. Sometimes those deceptions are very terrible. With the real knowledge there comes every now and then a blank, or, what is worse, the terrible word, "too late." One is thankful that for this poor little Thérèse there were better things, and that circumstances occurred to show her Fabien's character at once without the veil which might have carried on the deception and made her burden infinitely harder. She was silent. But over her face there came a soft, tender flush, her sweet eyes looked shyly up into his.

"Is there any hope?" he said again, bending over her, and speaking in a low, quick, eager tone.

And then into his outstretched hands she put her own. . . . .

Before they went home she told him all that had troubled her. And he, in his turn, told her something. He showed her the little dull balcony between the trees, where once he had pictured her sitting waiting, in the warm glow of light. They went a little nearer, these two, and looked at it. Nannon, who was getting rather tired of her play with the sturdy little woman who went solemnly through her pranks, came across, and asked what they were talking about.

"We are settling a new dress for mademoiselle," said M. Deshoulières, his honest blue eyes brimming over with fun. "It must be white and something shiny."

"White and shiny! That will be a bride's dress," cried Nannon, all her teeth showing. "So that is it, mademoiselle? I am as happy as a little cat. There is a little good news come at last; for, what with fevers and wickednesses, and that angel of a Jean-Marie wanting to go for a drummer ever since he saw the last review, I can scarcely sleep at night. And monsieur is going to have a deputation and the thanks of the town — has he heard?"

They went back slowly through the narrow tangled streets, and past the Evêché into the Place

Notre Dame. There rose the Cathedral, golden with the glow of the autumnal sun; there stood the serene statues encompassing it solemnly. Little dappled ranks of clouds rested quietly on the blue heavens, the jackdaws flew in and out of their carved homes; two great hawks that lived up there with them swooped lazily along, or hung poised in mid-air. After the stifling oppression of the summer, this cool, sweet autumn came with a sense of delicious relief. These two had their hearts almost too full for speech, but I do not know that silence was not as sweet to both. I do not know that we can leave them better than here, under the shadow of the great Cathedral, in the glow of the golden sunshine.

The little notary had disappeared, and, except the fact that he had not been seen at Tours, nothing could be ascertained about him. Whether he fled from the fever, his wife, or Monsieur Saint-Martin, remained also an open question for Charville to decide. He never came back again, that was the only sure point. Thérèse went to Madame Aubert for a little while, for Madame Roulleau, when no tidings arrived from her husband, left Charville — a broken-down woman. M. Deshoulières best knows where she is gone. And Fabien is reported to have married a widow, rich and noble, and to live in superb apartments in Paris.

Charville has not changed very much, after all. Something has been done, but it remains still almost the same picturesque, shadowy, dirty old town. Down by the stone fountain the women chatter and gossip as shrilly as ever, and drown the undertone of the river; the sun shines softly upon the yellow cornfields, and the tall gabled roofs, and the Cathedral that crowns them all. One fancies it is a little like a life. Above broken imperfections, above din and jar and fret, there rises evermore the something higher towards which our eyes may turn, our weary feet may press. If it were not so, we should be lingering in the cornfields and in the streets for ever. But when we once have felt that other beauty, its desire can never again go out of our souls. And there are many ways by which we are led upwards.

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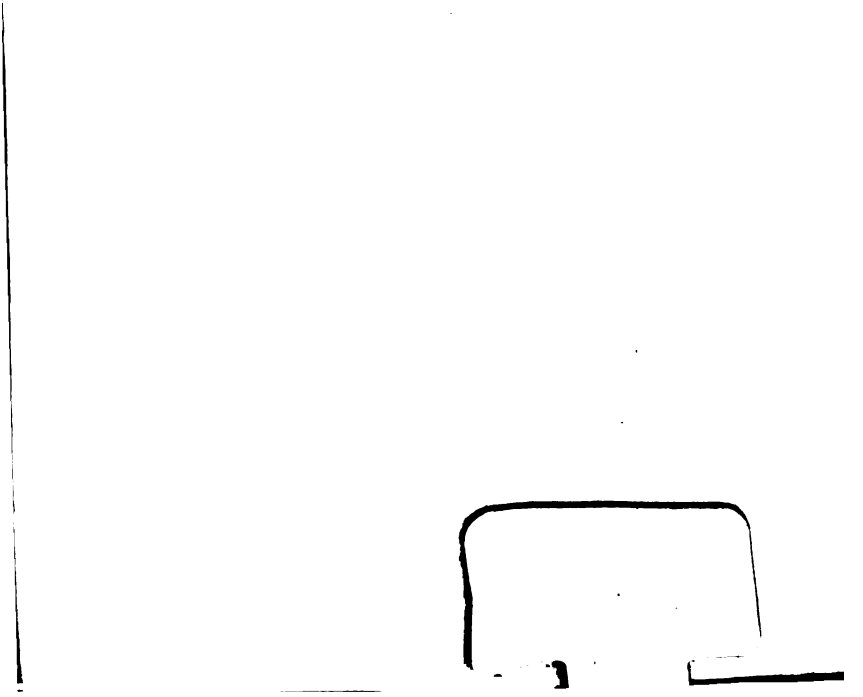
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